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FOR A STRIKING TABLEAU MET POWELL'S EYE!

OR,

The One-Armed Giant.

A Story Founded on Incidents in the Romantic
Life of Dr. Frank Powell (White Beaver),
White Medicine Chief of the
Winnebagoes.*

BY MAJ. H. B. STODDARD, EX-SCOUT,
AUTHOR OF "KID GLOVE KIT AND PARD," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A MAN AMONG MEN.

"WELL, the world has gone against me; but,
thank God, it is not through my own fault! It

* Dr. Frank Powell is now practicing medicine in
St. Paul, Minn., although still retaining his position
as White Medicine Chief of the Winnebago Indians.

is sufficient excuse for me that my cause was just, and although the Good Book says: 'Vengeance is Mine; I will repay it,' yet we humans cannot rise to the dignity of living up to all its teachings. I took my own vengeance, and now the last of my enemies has expiated his crimes, and my revenge is complete.

"Alone in the world; my fortune, my horse; my arms, my strength and courage—I will, with that steed, those weapons, that strength and that nerve, hew my way to fame and better fortune!"

"Yonder is my goal," and he pointed to the far western horizon, where a cloud-like object against the sky denoted the presence of the Rockies; "there, in the race for wealth, one man is no more heavily handicapped than another, and whatever of past he may have is left far behind and forgotten."

"Among those brave hearts and willing hands I will find a home. With those rough men I will cast my lot, and mayhap, in future years—the world forgetting, by the world forgot—the memory of these bitter days may become dulled and I may once more know what happiness is—if not happiness for self, then happiness for others."

"And now, Black Ben, my bonny steed, bear me away to yonder mountains, and together we will leave this world behind us, as the flying cruiser the port she has lately left."

The horse answered with a neigh of delight, and rubbed his nose caressingly against the shoulder of his master with every symptom of pleasure, for between brute and man existed as close a bond of sympathy as that born of close friendship and continued companionship could be.

Having looked well to saddle-cinch and throat-latch, the man swung himself lightly across his horse's back, and, loosening the rein, the willing animal bounded easily forward with a long, sweeping stretch, that swept the miles behind them like waves in the wake of the flying yacht.

And no better time can be found in which to give a pen-picture of the rider, who thus shook off his former life, and pressed so eagerly forward toward that future which he would find in the mountains.

And no finer specimen of perfect manhood ever served as model for portrait or statue, and the whole length and breadth of the plains might be swept in vain in search of as perfect grace and physical beauty as were combined in the form of the young rider who bestrode Black Ben.

Six feet, to a hair, in height, he was erect as a Norway pine, and straight as the finest arrow, while his frame was built in herculean proportions, so perfectly and symmetrically distributed that at first glance one could not realize what an immensely powerful man he was.

His eyes were black and piercing, yet in their somber depths lingered a look of softness and almost womanly tenderness that told how kind his heart was, and how gentle and courteous he could be, and how delicate his manner would become in the presence of women.

Innate chivalry, blended with a haughty self-confidence, was stamped on his somewhat stern face, for, although but twenty-five summers had shed their dew upon his head, yet he seemed thirty years old, so set and determined-looking were his fine mouth and chin.

Long hair, as black as the black diamonds furnished by the coal mines, hung in clustering ringlets far below his shoulders, while a long mustache of the same hue drooped over and shaded his handsome mouth.

He was dressed in a striking costume that fitted him admirably, and which consisted of a loose sack-coat and vest of dark blue—almost black—velvet, corduroy trousers, snugly tucked into the tops of high boots that came to his knee, while a broad, white sombrero was clapped negligently on his head, and shaded his face from the beating sun.

A belt, in which were stuck two navy sixes, encircled his waist, while a rifle strapped under his left leg, and a long, keen-edged knife, completed his armament.

Such was Frank Powell, better known as White Beaver, Medicine Chief of the Winnabagoes, and a firmer friend, a more formidable foe never extended his hand in kindness or in anger than he.

For injury done him he had tracked and slain the men who had crossed his path, and now, with the dead past buried, he was riding out toward a new home, new friends, and new fortune.

His good horse galloped bravely on over the unvarying monotony of the far-spreading

prairie, until the sun sunk behind the distant range, and the shadows from the lofty peaks extended to his feet.

The increasing freshness of the heat-burdened air was very grateful to both horse and rider, yet the latter began to feel a little uneasy at the rapid approach of night, not on his own account, but because of his horse.

For it was of the utmost importance that his camp should be in the vicinity of water, if he wished to continue his journey uninterruptedly the next day, and as yet he could see no signs of stream or creek in the neighborhood.

Yet the broken country on the north and a couple miles distant gave promise of water, for he had come in sight of abrupt bluffs that rose from the rolling prairie; so with a word of encouragement to his steed he swerved to the right, making for a point where the plain was rough and more undulating.

And in a few minutes he galloped over the rise in the prairie that formed the "divide" and looking down into the hollow below, drew his horse on to his haunches with a sudden pull. For a striking tableau met Powell's eye!

A tableau in which the central figure was a veritable giant, who stood under an improvised gallows, a noose around his neck, his single arm bound behind him, while a score of scowling men were gathered about their victim, ready, at a moment's notice, to swing him into eternity!

CHAPTER II.

BRAVING A SCORE.

THE means used to prepare their instrument of execution were novel, and showed that their ingenuity was not at fault when vengeance was to be satiated.

Two wagons had been drawn up, side by side, and their tongues, lifted high in the air, had been braced sharp up by ropes fastened to the neck-yokes and drawn back to the hind axles.

Across these two uprights was lashed a third wagon-pole at a sufficient height from the ground to allow the victim to swing clear, while across this latter support was thrown the rope at the end of which was the fatal noose.

Several of the men were seated in the wagons, leaning against the tail-boards, so that the weight of the giant might not overbalance the wagons, and, lifting the hind wheels, lower him to the ground by causing the tongues to topple forward.

The prisoner was a man of Titanic build, but evidently had suffered from some accident, as the left sleeve of his shirt—for he was coatless—hung limp and empty at his side.

For a moment Powell sat like a statue, looking down upon the scene below, and then, plunging his spurs deep into his horse's side, he rode down into the band like a tornado and sprung to the ground with the words:

"Stay, gentlemen! What murderers' work is this?"

Startled and astonished the men fell back, right and left, and gazed at him for a moment without replying; then the boldest of their number stepped out and addressed the new-comer.

"Ye'r a leetle fresh with yer talk about 'murderers,' young feller, an' want ter be a bit keeful w'ot ye're about."

"String him up, boys!"

"Stop! That man does not hang until I'm satisfied that he well deserves his punishment!"

"He does hang, an' hangs till dead!" snarled the other as he again turned to his companions.

"Up with him, boys!" and at the word the men who held the cord walked away toward the rear of and between the two wagons, and dragged the victim high in the air where he hung dangling and gasping, with protruding eyes and tongue, slowly strangling to death.

But, only for an instant.

Crack!

And cut, as if by a stroke of a keen knife, the rope parted, and the huge form dropped with a crash to the ground.

The rider had drawn his revolver, and apparently without taking aim, had fired at the tense cord, his bullet striking it fairly and of course severing it in an instant; at the same time crying—

"And I say he shall not hang!"

For a moment every one stood in silent amazement, staring at this reckless man who so audaciously dared to brave that number of infuriated men and place his own life at their disposal, as it seemed.

With a simultaneous shout, twenty weapons were drawn, twenty guns or revolvers cocked.

But their leader, or the man who appeared to be such, stepped between his men and Powell, waving his hand to lower the weapons, while

Frank, having replaced his still smoking pistol in his belt, stood with folded arms, quietly facing the frowning band before him.

"Young feller," said the leader, in an angry tone, yet unable to repress a glance of admiration at the man who had thus braved their wrath: "You air cl'ar grit, but ye'r 'way off ter come hyar a-tryin' ter save men w'ot hain't got no call on ye. Yer too fine a feller to take a thief's part an' run ther risk o' slippin' yer own neck in ther noose; so—stan' back an' let ther cirkus move, or—"

The pause and the scowl were far more suggestive than words, even without the significant motion of the finger toward the weapon, yet Powell did not stir, but quietly spoke.

"What has this man done that you should hang him up like a dog, without trial, judge or jury?"

"Thet's none o' your bizness."

"Then, by the Eternal Heavens! I'll make it my business!"

Still the same quiet tones, still the same quiet smile, still the same folded arms and immovable position; one might compare him to a volcano slumbering and only disclosing the presence of the pent-up fires beneath, by the slight film of smoke that hangs over the quiet crater.

"Yer hev a good deal ter say fur a kid like ye be. What air yer name?"

"That does not concern you, at all, that I know of, but still I will gratify your curiosity; 'some men call me Dandy Frank, others Fancy Frank, still others the Magic Doctor, but to most persons in city and on plain, I am known as Dr. Frank Powell.'"

"What! Frank Powell?"

"The same."

"Doctor Frank Powell?"

"Doctor Frank Powell!"

"Then, ol' man, put her thar," and the spokesman extended his brawny hand and waited for Powell to grasp it.

"This is a sudden change in your manner, my friend," said Powell, not knowing what treachery might be intended; "what does this mean?"

"It means, Doc., thet a year or so ago ye saved ther life of a man w'ot hed been hooked by a steer, an' thet man war me!"

"You!"

"You bet."

"I war purty nigh dead when you cut me open, an' ther doctors to Kansas City hed give me up, but w'en you slashed yer knife inter me an' giv' me thet relief I thought you war an angel cum down from hevin. I didn't see nothin' of ye, an' wouldn't 'a' know'd it war you ef one o' ther doctors hedn't sed so. Now will yer shake?"

"Willingly, my friend, and I am glad to learn that you are all right."

"But tell me what does this mean—what has this man done?" and turning, he pointed to the still prostrate giant, who lay where he had fallen, staring with wide open eyes at his rescuer, and wondering how all this would end.

"Done!" echoed a voice from the crowd of men who clustered about the wagons; w'y he's stole my pile, thet's w'ot he's done, an' he's goin' ter swing fer it, too, ye kin bet yer butes!"

"I decidedly doubt that statement," returned Powell calmly.

"Wal, yer needn't. Yer may hev saved ther life o' Californy, thar, but derved ef yer kin save 'One-Armed Ol,' kin he boys?"

"Yer bet he kain't!" was the sullen, almost general response.

"Shoot him!"

"Knife him!"

And a dozen other cries arose from the crowd, angry at the prospect of being baffled of their prey.

And the man who had dared Powell, sprung forward to re-adjust the rope about the giant's neck when Frank, extending his left hand and stepping one pace forward, seized him by the collar and with one mighty fling threw him high into the air over the cross-bar of the improvised gallows, where he hung, yelling with pain and fright.

And Powell, drawing his revolvers like a flash, faced the shrinking crowd and cried in thundering tones.

"The first man who moves, dies in his tracks!"

CHAPTER III.

A STRATEGIC MOVE.

FOR a moment the crowd of men that confronted Frank Powell stood as if petrified with amazement that one man should dare thus to face such fearful odds, and then with a roar

like the bursting of a volcano the human flood rushed upon him.

But, Powell had, during that instant, resolved on his course, and now he executed. With a bound like a panther leaping on its prey, he sprang to the spot where One-Armed Oll was lying, with a circular sweep of his knife—for he had drawn it as he sprang, placing one of his revolvers in his belt, and unsheathing the blade with one and the same motion—he cut the ropes that fastened the giant, and with a cry:

"To your feet and defend yourself!"

With a second leap he sprang behind one of the wagons, fell to the ground and fired, under the wagon-bed, into the crowd on the other side.

At the same instant California and One-Armed Oll imitated his example; Powell, after firing, handing the latter one of his revolvers.

As the double report rung out on the air came the clarion cry:

"Stand! or we fire again!"

And the baffled crowd seen by the men who thus defied them, but unable to see them, stood fast, fearing to move, lest, like their two comrades, they might be pierced through hip and thigh by the unerring bullets from Powell's never-failing weapons.

True, one of their number, less cautious than his companions, attempted to bend and fire under the wagon; but before he had lowered his pistol sufficiently to bring the trio in range, California had sent a message to him in the shape of a conical piece of lead, that persuaded him to lie down and die, and abandon all further efforts to dislodge them.

One-Armed Oll—the man who had so nearly met his death by the rope, so lay that his body shielded that of Powell—a tacit acknowledgment on his part that his life was no longer his own, but belonged to the man who had saved him.

And so they remained for several minutes, the men not daring to move, as they realized that the slightest motion would be followed by the crack of a revolver and injury, if not death to one of their number.

Yet they kept on talking to each other, and as all spoke at once, a confusion of sounds arose, amidst which it was not possible to distinguish one word from another.

Finally one, who seemed to be the leader, called for silence, and addressing his companions, said:

"Boys, this yere trouble hez gone fur 'nough, an' we air coralled; fur them them three hez got the bulge on us, an' it ain't no use a tryin' ter lick 'em, fixed ez they air."

"I purpose ter hev a compermize, an' ef it air agreeable ter ye, I'll perpose it to yer."

"Go on with yer thunder."

"Shoot ahead."

"Give it to us, sharp!"

"We're wid yel!"

And a half a dozen exclamations of like character urged him on.

"Well, thet feller w'ot ye heerd call himself Powell air, to my knowin', ther wu'st man ter tackle on ther perarie, an' he hez got ther dead drop on us; so, boys, I am a-goin' ter weaken, throw up both han's an' quit, an' I think thet's ther best thing we all kin do."

"It air tuff, but w'ot kin we do? Ef we more we air gone. Ef we make an attack some on us hez got ter go under, an' w'ot's the use, I says!"

"We air in a hostile kentry, an' ef we get ter fit'in' mongst ourselves, we air goin' ter be eventastin'ly chewed up."

"What does yer all say?"

"Ye'r right, Jim," growled one of the wounded men, who lay on the ground, and who had been an attentive listener to all that was said.

"We air in ther hole, an' thar's no use ter crawl outen it, unless Doc Powell thar len's us a hand."

"I'm willin' ter surrender, fur one."

"An' me," "an' me," came from a score of voices, and seeing that the almost unanimous opinion of the men was that discretion was the better part of valor, Jim, as the spokesman was called, again raised his voice, standing still in his tracks, and not daring to turn more than his head.

"Say, Doc, air it peace?"

"If you so wish," came back the cool rejoinder from the imperturbable Powell, who seemed as unconcerned as though in a lady's boudoir, airily conversing on the most indifferent subjects.

"An' w'ot is the conditions?"

"What conditions do you demand?"

"We want ter hev a trial of One-Arm Oll, an'

yer kin be jedge, an' ef yer sez he air innercent, then w'ot yer sez, goes—hey, boys?"

"Thet's fair, by gum, an' ther Doc's a squar' man, an' we're willin' ter leave ther hull bizness ter him."

"Your proposition is certainly a fair one, and if you promise that we shall not be harmed, and that One-Armed Oll, as you call him, shall have a fair trial, I'll agree," returned Powell.

"But, mind—no treachery, or—"

"All right, Doc," replied Jim, answering for his companions, "yer kin come out an' won't be hurt."

Not hesitating an instant, Powell rose to his feet, uncocking his revolver and placing it in his belt as he did so, thus placing himself entirely at the mercy of his late adversaries.

But not a weapon was raised against him; not a threatening motion was made, and he strode, unharmed, into the midst of the crowd, who fell back respectfully, and hurried to the side of the wounded man.

"My friend," he said, in a voice as gentle as a woman's, "I put that bullet in there, and ought to know where it has lodged; let's see if we can't find it."

And with a nerve that was steady, a hand that was as true, as his skill was wonderful, he made a bold incision in the man's side and the bullet dropped onto the ground, whence it was picked up by the doctor and handed to the wounded man, who bore his suffering like a hero.

For a few moments the wounds were dressed and bandaged, the saddle-bags on Powell's horse furnishing ointment, lint and plasters, the man made comfortable in an improvised hammock, made of a blanket swung between the wagons, and then Powell, having examined the other victims of the fray, and having satisfied himself that they were beyond human aid, turned to One-Armed Oll, who had been following him about and aiding him and said, sternly:

"And now, sir, we will attend to your case, and rest assured that if you are guilty you shall be punished, if you are innocent you shall go free."

"What is the charge against this man and who makes it?"

But before a word could be uttered in response a shout from far over the plain attracted every one's attention, and, looking, they saw a single rider spurring toward them for life and death, while fifty horsemen pursued him, yelling, now that they saw that they were discovered like fiends incarnate.

CHAPTER IV.

DEFIANCE.

THE horse ridden by the pursued man was nearly exhausted and it was evident to all that he would not last until the camp was reached and that the pursuers would inevitably overtake the fleeing man and work their will upon him if they were not interfered with.

Taking in the situation at a glance, Doctor Powell, springing to where his horse yet stood, the well-trained animal not having moved since his rider had descended, threw himself into the saddle and before the others fully realized his intention, was spurring over the plain toward the approaching band of riders.

But he did not head Black Ben directly toward the pursued man, but rather swerved to the left, and then circling, galloped between the hunted and his hunters.

At that moment the horse of the fleeing man—utterly exhausted—stumbled, rose again, stumbled once more, and finally pitched heavily forward, throwing his rider far over his head, and fell to the turf dead, while the man, falling heavily, lay insensible, and evidently seriously hurt.

One-Armed Oll, when he had seen Doctor Powell dash out over the prairie so recklessly, hesitated not a moment, but, leaping out with a magnificent stride, bounded over the prairie toward the prostrate man, carrying with him the revolver Powell had given him.

Reaching the side of the insensible man he stooped and grasping him about the waist, with a mighty swing, flung him over his shoulder and started back toward the wagons, carrying his burden as if it had been a feather's weight, while behind him sounded the rapidly repeated cracking of a rifle, as Powell, unslinging his weapon, opened fire on the men who were riding in this race for life, bringing them to a sudden halt and emptying more than one of their saddles.

For some reason that he could not comprehend, his fire was not returned, save by one or two scattering shots, so that he soon ceased firing, and sat like a statue, awaiting future

developments, while he calmly surveyed his adversaries and endeavored to penetrate their disguises—for disguised he was certain they were.

The waving plumes, the dress, the weapons carried by the men—all demonstrated the fact that they were Indians, yet, cunning as had been the director of this masquerade, he had overlooked one important item—that of saddle and bridle, and even at that distance the keen and practiced eye of Frank Powell distinguished incongruities in the make-up of the band, that stamped them as white men.

But he was not left long in doubt, for one of the men, leaving his companions, rode rapidly forward alone, waving a white cloth in token of truce, and quickly reaching speaking distance called out to the young doctor, who sat quietly awaiting his arrival—using such perfect English, that if any doubt had yet remained in Powell's mind, it would have at once been dissipated.

"I desire," said the new-comer, "to hold a short parley with you."

"Let it be short, then," curtly replied Powell, keeping a wary eye on his accoster.

"You have in your camp, yonder, a young person who is my prisoner, and although that young person has temporarily escaped, I am convinced that when you are made acquainted with the facts you will no longer interfere."

"What are these important facts?" sneeringly queried Frank Powell.

"I have a claim on that person that even you will not dispute."

"Not so sure of that. When I see one against fifty, I generally espouse the cause of the one, and question the status of the case afterward."

"That is border custom, I know; but in this case custom would be madness. Glance toward my men, and you will see that there are fifty of them."

"Not all available though," interrupted Powell, again sneering at the man who was gradually losing his temper under the quiet sarcasm of the other.

"True; your rifle spoke frequently and to the point, and had I not checked my comrades, your fate would before this have been that of those whom you have done to death."

"Possible, but not probable. Yet you are wasting time and might as well come to the point."

"You demand that I should deliver up to you the young fellow we recently rescued; on what grounds do you base this demand?"

"On grounds none dare deny the justice of; on the grounds that the person whom you speak of as a young fellow, is—my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Precisely—my lawfully sealed wife."

"Sealed! Then it is as I suspected. You and your band are Mormons."

"We are."

"And masquerading over the plains in a very easily penetrated disguise."

"Be the disguise good or bad it serves our purpose."

"And that purpose is?"

"That purpose is—none of your affair, Doctor Frank Powell."

"You know me, then."

"Yes, I know you, and the Church knows you, and is tiring of your presence here on earth."

"Beware, Frank Powell, for the Destroying Angels know no law but that of their religion, and if the heads of that religion bid them do anything, no power on earth can prevent the carrying out of that order."

"I am not here to discuss the merits or demerits of your bands of authorized assassins."

"Will you come to the point, or am I to suppose our conversation at an end?"

"I tell you the girl is my wife, and I demand that she be given up to me."

"Do you imagine for an instant that I recognize any of the tenets of your so-called Church?"

"Do you imagine that I am of the opinion that any such a farce as 'sealing,' gives you any control over that poor child?"

"It is on a par with the usual actions of your church, that you should hunt her, with fifty armed men, as you would a ravening wolf."

"Fifty armed men against one poor defenseless child! Pah! It is an action worthy of the savages whose costumes you have assumed."

"Have a care, Frank Powell! Do not go too far, or we will cease to parley, and resort to arms! And you know what the result will be; or if you do not—count your men and then count mine."

"See here, Mr. Destroying Angel, or whatever you may call yourself, you are protected

by that white cloth you carry; but if you do not soon return to that howling mob, yonder, by the powers that rule the earth, I will send you on a longer journey than the one I now suggest to you!" and the sharp click of a cocked revolver emphasized the remark.

The Mormon evidently realized that Frank Powell was in deadly earnest, for, not hesitating an instant, he wheeled his horse in the direction of his men, and galloped back toward his band, while Powell, after seeing that the man was well on his way, also turned and cantered back to the wagons, where the men were impatiently awaiting his arrival.

"Men!" he cried, as he rode up to where they were standing, and pointing to the yet inanimate form of the rescued girl, "those supposed Indians are Mormons in disguise, and are trying to drag that child, against her will, to their camp."

"Will you permit this?"

"No! no! no!" came from a dozen voices, all the innate chivalry of the plainsmen aroused by the sight of a girl in distress.

"Thank you; I did not think you would. So, then, we will defend her to the end."

And looking quickly around, Powell, with the all-embracing glance of a man born to command, took in the situation at once, and proceeded to station his men where they could best defend the camp, reserving the post of danger for himself, as he always did.

CHAPTER V.

"WAR!"

FOR a few moments there was a lull in the proceedings, while the men, dropping for a time their own quarrels, joined hands, so to speak, and made common cause against the common enemy.

The leader of the Mormons had by this time reached his band, and from the manner in which they clustered about him it could readily be understood that they were consulting together as to what had best be done.

They were within range, and one of Powell's late adversaries could not forego the temptation of firing at so magnificent a target, so, resting his rifle on one of the wagon-wheels, he took a steady aim and fired, landing his leaden messenger plum in the center of the gathering, sending one of them to the ground and causing the others to scatter like a flock of frightened sheep.

In an instant they were dispersed and scudded away over the prairie, until they were hidden by a rise in the ground which protected them from the camp, while a shout of laughter went up from the plainsmen as they congratulated their comrade upon the success of his shot.

But their hilarity was broken in upon by the ringing voice of Frank Powell, who came stalking into their midst from the advanced post he had chosen.

"Boys," he cried, "those men have only retired temporarily, and will, no doubt, attack us within a short time—that is as soon as the sun has gone down and night hides their movements."

"They have not returned our fire because they fear to injure the girl; but I know, and you know, the Mormons too well to anticipate that they will abandon their attempt to gain possession of their former prisoner."

"One of you remain on guard while the others prepare supper. I will look after the girl, for this long swoon is beginning to be alarming."

And going to one of the wagons in which the injured maiden had been carefully placed on a half-dozen blankets and made as comfortable as circumstances would permit, he examined her head carefully, realizing that it was there that the injury must lie that caused this continued unconsciousness.

And at almost the first touch of his skilled fingers he located the wound, and found that in falling she had struck on her head and that a small pin, which fastened her hair and which was ornamented with a ball of solid gold, was the cause of the trouble and that her skull was fractured.

The wound was not necessarily mortal, and he set about restoring her to consciousness—which, with the aid of sundry drugs he carried with him, he soon succeeded in doing.

But with consciousness came no return of reason, and he realized that a surgical operation must be performed and her brain relieved of the pressure caused by the small fractured bit of bone, before she would be able to comprehend what was passing and recall what had happened.

And pitying her deeply he stood and looked at the lovely pale face of the girl, whose quivering

lips betokened such intense suffering, whose magnificent eyes shone with no look of intelligence.

She was perhaps seventeen—maybe younger, and was as fair in feature, as perfect in form as any poet's dream or sculptor's ideal.

Slightly above the average height, her hands and feet were molded on a marvelously small scale, while her long, golden hair, now released from the thralldom of the confining pin, swept down over the blankets that formed her couch in a flood of glittering glory.

She was a flower plucked from a lovely garden of girls, and it was a sad fate that had befallen her, that she should thus be lying, helpless and injured, in the midst of the wide prairie, with no friends near her and with a band of men—Mormons—the ravening wolves of the West—bent on capturing her and carrying her off to a living death.

And Frank Powell, his heart filled with pity for the defenseless child and his eyes swelling with tears of which no honorable man need be ashamed, vowed, with a deep oath, to save her from the awful fate that threatened her.

For he did not believe that any ceremony had been performed by which the Mormon Church could claim her as its own, as he was convinced that there was a Mormon train in the vicinity, and that she among other deluded converts, had been persuaded to join the train, under pretense of some one of the glittering and glowing futures with which the missionaries of Utah are in the habit of deluding their victims.

But as Powell stood there, at a loss to know what to do in this case, a warning cry from the sentinel posted on the plain, some distance out, recalled him to a sense of his surroundings, and turning, he looked out over the prairie and saw, riding leisurely toward them, a second emissary, who was waving a second flag of truce, and who, arriving at a distance of three or four hundred yards from the wagons, stopped and sat motionless, apparently waiting until some one should ride out and accost him.

As if the same thought had struck each and all of the men, they turned to Powell, as if expecting that he would investigate the matter, so, leaving the young girl lying back on the blankets, he walked quickly out toward the new-comer and accosted him.

"What is wanted now?" he asked, sternly, for he was becoming weary of these persistent efforts on the part of the Mormons to parley with him.

"We want the girl," laconically replied the Mormon.

"I have but one answer to give to that demand, and have already given it, so advise you not to persist."

"But I have a proposition to make to you, doctor."

"Well, let's hear it," impatiently replied the young physician.

"Give up the girl to us and we'll let you and your men go. Refuse, and we will attack you, take our revenge for the murder of our comrades, and carry off the young woman in spite of you."

"We outnumber you and will have no trouble in doing as we wish; but we do not care to fight unless compelled to do so."

"You have your choice; give her up quietly, and go your way, or—refuse and there will not be one of you left to tell the story of Mormon vengeance."

"Choose!"

Repressing his anger with an effort, Powell, merely remarking, "Wait here a moment," turned and walked back to the wagons, and going to one of them, where he had seen a bundle of arrows, captured from some wandering red-skin, he took one of the shafts from the sheaf, and turning again, stalked out over the prairie to where the Destroying Angel awaited him, and, taking the arrow by the head, extended his hand without a word.

The Mormon took the arrow and glanced at it quickly.

"This is a war arrow!" he exclaimed, quickly, as he saw the barbed head.

"Precisely."

"Then your decision is war?"

"Precisely."

"You do not mean—"

"I mean," thundered Powell, that if you send any more skulking spies, I will shoot them down as I would a wolf, bear they flags of truce or not!

"If you want the girl—come and take her!"

Without a word the rider wheeled his horse and rode away, and without a word Frank Powell returned to the camp.

"Boys," said he as the men pressed forward

to meet him, "it is war to the death or a surrender of that poor child."

"Which do you choose?"

"War!" came back the unanimous answer.

"Then look well to your weapons, for there will be lively times around here to-night."

CHAPTER VI.

AN UNLUCKY STUMBLE.

DARKNESS settled down over the scene and with the approach of night came heavy clouds that covered the heavens until the sky was black as midnight.

The young girl still lay in the wagon where she had been placed and Powell had carefully attended to her and, having administered a slight narcotic, now had the relief of seeing her fall into a deep slumber, that promised to last until morning.

He then had attended carefully to the posting of the sentinels and being assured that all had been done that could be done to protect the camp, was now seated talking to One-Armed Oll, while on his left stood California.

"Tell me," said Powell—for we now have a little time, as it is not probable that any attack will be made upon us before midnight—tell me about this trouble that came so near resulting in your death, Oll.

But before the latter, could reply, California broke in:

"It was this way," he said. "Oll an' Jim war a-bunkin' tergether, an' this mornin' w'en Jim 'woke, he missed his belt whar he kep' his pile."

"He looked 'roun' an' see Oll a-comin' towards him, an' see the belt a-hangin' out o' Oll's pocket."

"Jim grabbed it an' opened it, an' found thet the money were gone, so he 'cused Oll o' stealin' it, an' that he was a-comin' back to put ther belt whar he hed got it from an' hed hid ther money."

"Ther boys, w'en they heerd o' it, give Oll ten hours ter return it, an' swore they'd hang him inside that time ef he didn't show up. An' they would hev, too, ef yer hedn't blocked ther game."

"Well, Oll, what have you to say?" queried Powell, turning to the giant.

"W'y only thet I foun' Jim's belt lying on ther groun' over yonder, an' picked it up, an' war a-goin' ter give it ter him, w'en he flew up, an' 'cused me o' stealin' ther money; but I never seen it."

"Well, to-morrow we will investigate the matter and see if we can't clear you, for you know it's tough papers for a man to be suspected of being a thief."

"I know it," growled Oll, "an' I ain't a-goin' ter stand it, neither," and he sat grumbling until Powell told him to hush, as a suspicious sound, wafted from over the prairie by the gentle night-wind caught his attention.

"The Mormons are up to some devilment," he whispered, "and I'll just take a stroll and see what is up."

"You stay here and watch the girl and see that no harm comes to her."

And rising, Powell walked away out on the plain, looking cautiously ahead and bending low in an endeavor to see if he could catch sight of any moving object, and listening intently for any suspicious sound.

But all was quiet, and he could see nothing, on account of the almost impenetrable darkness that enshrouded the earth, and so he proceeded onward, as stealthily as a cat stealing on its prey, stopping every few steps to reconnoiter.

He proceeded thus for some time, and was about to give up his expedition and return to camp when a whispered word struck his ear and as he set his right foot—which had been lifted as the voice reached him—on the ground he stepped into a hole burrowed in the prairie and falling heavily forward, he crashed to the ground, and fell prone upon his face between two men who were seated on the grass.

In an instant they were upon him and before he could turn, the running noose of a lariat had been slipped over his arms and about his body, and a sombrero clapped over his face so as to muffle his voice, and in less time than it takes the eye to glance at these lines he was bound, gagged and helpless.

His captor then struck a light and looked at him, and when the flickering flame revealed his face one of the men uttered an exclamation and whispered—although there seemed no reason that he should lower his voice, as they were far distant from the wagons:

"Here's luck! We've captured their leader and now there will be slight difficulty in recap-

turing the girl, and wiping out that gang of cow-punchers."

"You know him, then?" queried his comrade, bending eagerly forward.

"Yes; he's the man that I had the conversation with this afternoon, and the one who defied us."

"The captain will be decidedly glad to learn of our capture, and will be much pleased to make his acquaintance."

"Then I'll go back to where the men are and tell him of this, and he can come out and interview our prisoner."

"Yes; and I'll remain here and watch him for he is as slippery as an eel, if I know the difference between a coyote and a prairie-dog."

"All right; watch him closely, and I'll hurry back with the captain."

And so Powell remained, unable to move, for some minutes, until the sound of footsteps hurrying toward them, notified him that the messenger was returning with the man he called the captain.

The leader, arriving alongside Powell, stopped and stood a moment, as if exulting in his discomfiture, and then, turning to one of his men, whispered a few words to him.

"Good scheme, Cap," replied the other, chuckling as though something amused him, "an' you are the very man to carry it out."

"Think so?"

"I know it; same size, same build, almost the same voice, nothing will prevent your succeeding, for it is so dark they would never suspect."

"Well, it's worth trying at any rate, and I'll risk it."

"Return to where the men are stationed, and order them not to make any noise until I return—that is, if I do not return within an hour, you will know something is up, and you had best make the attack as arranged."

"All right, Cap, good luck to you!"

As the man disappeared in the darkness, the captain, or leader, of the Mormons again approached Powell, and seating himself on the grass beside him, addressed him:

"A brave man is entitled to more consideration than an ordinary prisoner, and is always honorable."

"Promise me, by nodding your head, that you will not call out or make any signal, and I will take the gag from your mouth."

A moment's hesitation and then Powell nodded his head slowly, and the gag was removed from his lips, when, after a few deep respirations, he asked:

"What do you want?"

"You are wholly in my power, and I wish to make a proposition to you."

"We Mormons, as you know, are merciless, and when any one crosses our path we do not step around, but over them."

"You now have the opportunity of saving your life by exchanging for it one who is of no interest to you."

"Promise me that you will deliver the girl to me, if I accompany you to your camp, and allow us to return thence, unharmed, and your bonds shall be loosed and you are a free man."

"Refuse, and—well, you know as well as I can tell you what the consequences will be."

There was a moment's silence, and then Powell's answer came.

"What was it? We shall see; but the fact remains that shortly after, two men, one of whom might have been recognized as Frank Powell, left the spot, hurried toward the wagons, and after being challenged by, and passing the sentinel, walked, unrebuked, to the wagon where the girl was lying, and by which One-Armed Oll was standing."

CHAPTER VII.

THE MASSACRE.

THE girl was sleeping heavily, owing to the influence of the narcotic that Powell had administered, and was entirely unconscious of her surroundings, while Oll stood silently by, faithful to the trust that Powell had confided to him.

The two new-comers approached the wagons, having visited one or two of the others previously, as if to see whether any of the men were shirking duty, and then the taller of them whispered to Oll.

"She seems to be sleeping pretty quietly."

"Yes, sir," replied the one-armed giant, "an' she hain't moved once sence you left."

"Yer must hev give her a strong dose o' sumthin' ter make her sleep like thet."

"But, did yer larn anything wile yer were a-scoutin' out yonder?"

"Not much, except that the Mormons seem to be getting ready to attack us."

"Go and make a round of the camp, and see if the men are on the alert, for the attack may be made at any moment."

"All O. K., sir," replied Oll, as he turned in obedience to the command, and moved off in the darkness.

Immediately on his disappearance, the two men, seizing the ends of the blanket on which the unconscious girl lay, lifted her from the wagon, and, cautiously threading their way out of the camp, and going in the direction opposite to that from which they had come, and by great good-fortune escaping observation, struck over the plain and taking a wide circuit, finally came to the point where Powell had been captured, where they deposited their burden on the ground, when one of them left his companion, soon returning with two led horses, between which was slung a sort of improvised litter, upon which the unconscious girl was placed, when both men again started off and soon rejoined their comrades, who greeted them with suppressed exclamations of joy and congratulated them warmly.

The trick had succeeded, and the leader, Mervin Welker, disguised in Powell's habiliments, had succeeded in penetrating the fold and carrying off the lamb, while Powell, her sworn protector, lay, still bound and helpless, in the power of her enemies.

"Now, men," cried Welker, after he had ordered and obtained silence, "what do you say: Shall we wreak our wrath on yonder men, and revenge ourselves for the death of our comrades?"

"Yes! yes!" came in unison from the band he commanded.

"Then so be it; as for our prisoner, we will hold him as such until we reach the main body and will then submit him to the mercies of our chief."

"Ten of you—you, Claren and your squad, take charge of the girl and the man, and start on your road to rejoin the main body, and after we have finished with yonder crew, we will follow and overtake you."

The discipline of the band was perfect and in a few moments the guard was *en route*, Powell being mounted on his horse, while the girl reclined in the improvised litter and still slumbered quietly.

And then the men who remained behind began their preparations for the attack on the camp, and, silently as the painted savages whose disguises they wore, they crept forward over the plain as quietly as the shadows of the night.

Advancing first in a straight line, the extremities of which were nearly a thousand yards apart, they began finally to bend about and encircle the little bunch of wagons on which they were so stealthily advancing, until the living ring was complete and any one attempting to escape would have to pierce the cordon that encircled the camp.

And then they halted when the leader, still crouching low, stole like a tiger still further toward the wagons, stopped and raising his hand on high, flung a small circular object he carried into the middle space between the wagons, turned and hurried back to join his men.

As the object he had hurled struck the ground there was a slight explosion like the snapping of a musket-cap, and instantly there broke out on the darkness a bright and vivid light that illuminated the whole scene, and brought out every feature of the camp as plainly as if the mid-day sun blazed high in the heavens overhead.

With the flash came responsive flashes from the living line of painted warriors, who, outside the circle of light, were thoroughly protected from the weapons of those in the camp, and as the report of the rifles rung out on the still night air, the holocaust began and human blood commenced to flow inside the space formed by the protecting wagons.

More than one of the brave fellows, who were thus corraled, attempted to extinguish the flame which exposed them to the merciless fire of their enemies, but such deadly fumes arose from the burning chemicals that it was almost instant death to venture near them, and choking, half-suffocating, the reckless fellows were driven back, powerless.

Water thrown on the chemical mixture only increased the fury of the flame, and at length seeing that all efforts to extinguish the fire would be futile, they abandoned the attempt and looked only to their safety and the defense of the camp.

And all the while the leaden hail was pouring in on them from all sides, and all the time the infernal invention in the middle of the camp blazed brightly, so that, one by one, they fell to the earth, dead or seriously wounded, while their ineffectual fire—with nothing to guide their

aim but the distant flashes of their adversaries' weapons—inflicted apparently no injury on the Mormon band.

Such one-sided warfare could have but one result, and soon, as the fire from the camp grew less and less rapid and finally ceased altogether, the Mormons, with wild yells that would have shamed their red brethren of the plains, made a fierce charge on the wagons, and, meeting with no resistance, scaled the walls of the improvised fortification, and with a brutality that was heightened by the sight of their helpless victims, hacked and mutilated and bruised the bleeding bodies until they retained slight, if any, vestiges of humanity.

Hurrying hither and thither, the fiendish band reveling in their shamble-house work like devils incarnate, spared not one, and as the light flickered out it left the camp to darkness and to death, for all of the men who had been there encamped had died, one after the other, until not one was left to tell the tale of this massacre—or so it seemed to the Mormons, who were satisfied that none had escaped.

So, exulting in their vengeance, they returned to where their horses were picketed, mounted and rode away after the main band, just as the first faint streaks of dawn illumined the east with delicate bands of gray and gold.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SCARED NIGGER.

THE sun, rising, looked down upon a scene of slaughter and bloodshed such as the plains too often witnessed in the days during which the incidents narrated in this story occurred, and under its warming rays the world awakened to life.

But the dead lay there motionless, and it seemed as if all had shared a common fate, when suddenly there was a movement in one of the wagons, a head was cautiously lifted, and a pair of keen eyes peered over the edge of the side-board, when the owner, having carefully scanned the horizon and assured himself that no one was in sight, rose, looked about him for a moment and then leaped to the ground.

It was One-Armed Oll, who alone of all those who had been so full of life and hope a few short hours before, remained alive—except Powell, and he was a prisoner to men who were merciless.

Accustomed as he had been for years to the sight of bloodshed and to scenes of border warfare, he shuddered, nevertheless, and for a moment felt sick and faint as he gazed on the mutilated remains of his former comrades; but he well knew that this was no time for qualmishness, and tracing himself with an effort, he turned his attention to getting himself something to eat and to attending to the wants of the horses that had not been driven off by the Mormons; they had come on an errand of vengeance and not one of plunder.

His work was quickly accomplished, for water was near at hand, and many of the horses had either been killed outright by the hail of bullets poured into the camp or so grievously wounded that Oll, out of compassion, put an end to their sufferings.

And then he began the work of looking over the bodies—he had before that satisfied himself that they were beyond human aid—and endeavoring to identify them by the weapons they carried, the clothes they wore, or the trinkets in their pockets.

And it was while making this search that he found the money which had so nearly been the cause of his death, in the inside pocket of one of the men who had been loudest in his denunciation, it evidently having been stolen during the night, the money taken, and the belt thrown aside to where Oll had found it.

Oll was acquainted with the family history of the man who had been robbed, so, carefully stowing away the cause of the trouble in one of his capacious pockets, he determined, at the first opportunity, to send it to the old mother who sat by her lonely fireside in distant Kentucky, praying for her boy who would nevermore return to her.

And now a new difficulty stared him in the face; he could not leave the bodies of his companions lying there on the prairie to be torn, wrangled over, and devoured by the coyotes and wolves that would surely gather with the coming night, yet he had no tools with which to dig their graves—the wagons being supplied with nothing of the sort. But one alternative presented itself—to save them from becoming the prey of the wild beasts he must burn the bodies, and this he determined to do.

Leading the three horses—there were but three left—off on the plain a half-mile or more

away from the camp, he picketed them firmly, and then returned to complete his disagreeable task.

Using his single hand with the strength of the veritable giant he was, he wheeled the wagons close together, removed the wheels, piled tongues, double-trees, axles, coupling-poles and beds in one heterogeneous mass, and then, picking up the bodies one by one, he placed them carefully on the heap.

A strong breeze was blowing from the west, and on that side of the pile he started the fire, using for the purpose a huge quantity of dried grass he collected in a wash-out near by, and soon the dry wood was crackling and blazing with an intense heat that bid fair to soon consume the entire pyre, while the iron-work on wheels and other portions of the wagons bent and curled and twisted like writhing serpents, while the weapons he had decided he could not use, and from which he had discharged the loads, were soon rendered entirely useless by the flames.

A dense cloud of smoke, blackened by the fumes from the tar and axle-grease, swept over the prairie, and hung far in the east, and Oll, realizing that he had done all that man could do to protect the bodies of his companions, and fearing lest the unwonted sight of the heavy smoke might attract the attention of some wandering band of savages, turned away from the spot, and was about to proceed in the direction of the horses, when a couple of moving figures, appearing suddenly over a rise in the prairie, turned his thoughts in a new direction.

They were still too far distant for him to be able to distinguish what they were, and wishing to establish their identity, he waited, being hidden from their view by the fiercely-burning fire, merely seeing that his weapons were ready for instant service.

He waited for some time, finally being able to distinguish the features of the new-comers, and stepping boldly out, as if all need of further concealment were past, he waited.

And certainly the appearance of the strangers was calculated to inspire laughter rather than fear.

The elder, and therefore the one entitled by right of courtesy to be first noticed, was an ancient negro, whose gray and grizzled woolly hair stamped his age indelibly on his head, while his clothes looked as if they had been brought into the world with him and had grown as he had grown, but had neglected to stop when he had attained his full stature, for they were a world too large for him.

Baggy trousers that had no more shape than meal sacks; a coat that was simply enormous, with wide spreading square tails, a flaming red handkerchief about his neck and a rusty stove-pipe hat, with a pair of No. 12 brogans, completed his visible attire, while he carried what could be seen at a glance to be a banjo case in his left hand, an enormous cane in his right, with the aid of which he hobbled along with difficulty—for they were unmounted—being apparently very lame.

His companion had nothing particularly noticeable about his attire—by comparison—and was much younger and more vigorous-looking. The latter carried a banjo in his hand and was humming an air while he picked an accompaniment on the strings.

Despite his late experiences and present lugubrious surroundings, Oll could but smile at the picture this pair, apparently indifferent to, or unconscious of, any danger, presented.

And as they came within hailing distance the old man doffed his ancient hat and bowing low, cried:

"Say, Mistah Boss, has yer any 'jection ter my gittin' a light from yer fiah?"

"A light fer what?" answered Oll.

"Fer my pipe. De ole man am purty nigh dead fur a uff, an' this hyar onerless, wufless niggab, hyah, hab done los' the flint."

"All right; come on an' help yourself," acquiesced Oll.

And the old man approaching the fire, was about to draw out a live coal from it, when he caught sight of a human foot projecting and slowly scorching over the embers, wher, with a wild yell he sunk on the ground and exclaimed, while his voice trembled with fear:

"Zeke, de white man hab killed anudder an' am cookin' him fur his breakfus'."

"Don't kill me an' eat me, boss! Ol' niggahs am mighty tough!"

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TRAIL.

It took Oll some time to convince the frightened negro of the facts in the case, but when

peace had finally been restored and the old man had calmed his nerves, the one-armed giant asked him regarding his late movements.

"We wuz camped wid de Mormons, boss," replied Old Eph, "an' war trabelin' wid Miss Ivy, who's on her way to j'ine her brudder."

"And whar is he?" queried the giant, but little interested in what Eph was saying, for he had begun to wonder what the explanation of Powell's disappearance could be.

"In the mountings," replied Eph. "He done writ ter Miss Ivy, an' tol' her thet he hed struck it rich, an' wanted her to j'ine him."

"And she war travelin' with ther Mormons, yer say," asked Oll, becoming suddenly interested as the thought struck him that there might be some connection between Miss Ivy and the young girl who had so mysteriously disappeared.

"Yes, sah. But she didn't know they wuz Mormons befo' yesterday."

"And how come she in the crowd?"

"W'en she war stoppin' at the hotel in St. Louis, she war askin' 'bout how she c'u'd fin' a train goin' cross the perarie, an' a man stoppin' thar tol' her that a lot o' immergrants was about to start an' thet, ef she wanted to she could j'ine 'em."

"And so she done it."

"Yes, boss, an' me an' Zeke 'companied her, fur, ye see, we hez been in the family fur since Zeke war borned, an' young missy kain't go nowhar unless we-uns is 'long wid her."

"We 'longs to her, sah."

"An' whar be she now?"

"De Lor' knows!"

"Yesterday sumfin' cum' up an' she 'spected that the people she was wid wasn't no immergrants: 't all, an' she done asked flat footed, w'en the top man he tole her w'ot they wuz, an' that w'en they got to Utah she was to be sealed, he said, to him."

"An' then?"

"An' then she giv' a sort of a wild screech, and raved aroun' an' tore her ha'r liken she was shore 'nuff crazy, an' soon slipped off, w'en they waz all a-eatin', took the bes' critter in ther herd, an' rode off."

"An' the others follered her?"

"Like littenin'."

"An' caught her?"

"Not as we knows: us—me an' Zeke—took up the road as soon as we c'u'd an' sneaked off after her, but we hain't seen nothin' of her, an' 'lowin' she's 'scaped the Mormons 'tain't more'n likely she got 'way from the lions an' the tagers an' the b'ars 'bout hyar."

"Ye hain't see'd nuthin' ob her, boss, 'hab ye?"

"What fur a-lookin' gal war she?"

"She war m'ity purty—slick an' slim an' great big eyes an' lots o' ha'r. Yaller ha'r that looked like gol'."

Oll thought that it was hardly worth while to explain to the old negro all that had happened and turned the subject by asking what Eph proposed doing.

"Us—me an' Zeke, air goin' ter foller the kentry over till we fin's missy, ain't us, Zeke?"

"Fo' sho'," briefly replied the young imp, who was masticating an unusually tough morsel of dried meat that he had taken from some hidden receptacle and crammed into his capacious jaws.

"You kin go with me," emphatically said Oll, realizing that their roads lay together and that these two innocent looking darkies might be of service in some manner as yet unknown to him.

"Bully for you, boss," shouted Zeke, turning a cart-wheel and somerset combined, "an' ef the Injines boddors us, you kin count on us a-runnin' ebery time."

"Hush yo' nonsense, boy," sternly reprimanded the old man, fetching the imp a box on the ear that sent him spinning, "ef the Injines sees you, they'll take yer and skelp yo' woolly head sho'."

At this dire picture of the physical torture to which he was to be subjected, the youth set up a lugubrious howl that sounded far over the prairie like the wail of a coyote, and would have kept it up indefinitely had not Oll brought sudden silence by sternly reprimanding him.

"Air you armed?" asked the giant, as he began to regret the destruction of the weapons he had placed on the fire, even though he doubted the ability of the negroes to use them.

For answer, the boy Zeke stooped and drew from his bootleg an enormous razor, with viciously keen edge and white handle.

"Da', boss, am de phizzick fur obnoxious niggers, an' w'ot am phizzick fur bad niggers am phizzick fur bad w'ite men, shuah."

"Well," replied Oll, grinning despite himself

and his surroundings, "put up your 'phizzick' until it is needed, and then give it to 'em, strong."

"All right, boss," answered the imp, putting his razor up.

"And now we'll start on the trail," continued Oll. "An' ef we hez Oll's ordinary luck, we'll soon overhaul ther doctor an' ther girl."

"Bully fer you, boss," chuckled Old Eph. "Hooray for Miss Ivy an' the Mormons!"

And the three, picking up their traps and casting a last look about to see if they were followed, started off over the prairie, following the broad, well-defined trail left by the Mormons when they had started for camp, with Frank Powell as their prisoner.

CHAPTER X.

A BROKEN OATH.

"YES, I can save the girl, and restore her to her right mind."

"Then why do you hesitate?"

"Because I am not yet certain whether it would not be best to leave her with clouded reason, than to cure her and give her up to the terrible fate that awaits her."

"Terrible fate; I do not exactly understand what you mean."

"What fate could be more terrible than for her to be married—sealed, you call it—to a Mormon?"

"Curb your tongue, Doctor Frank Powell, or I may find it necessary to curb it for you—a word to the wise is, or should be, sufficient."

"I will no more curb my tongue than I curb my thoughts, those you cannot restrain. But all this time that poor child is lying there unconscious, and I owe it to her to be silent."

"Should I cure her, will you promise me one thing?"

"Let me hear what it is, first."

"You seem to take a great interest in her—love her perhaps, and would marry her yourself, if you could. If I cure her, will you allow her to go free?"

"And you?"

"You may do with me as you like, when I return."

"Return! Again I must confess—"

"When she is well, I will take her and return with her to the East—to her home—leave her in the care of her friends and then come back to you."

"And what security have I that you will do this?"

"My word! No one can say that Frank Powell ever broke it."

"I accept, but no one must know of this—perform your duties quietly and secretly, cure the girl and leave us, taking her with you. I will tell the chief of her accident, but will remain quiet as to the sequel, and he will think that I allowed her to go because of her infirmity. As for yourself, every one here knows you, and you will get me into serious trouble, if you break your word—which I accept."

"And I accept your proposition provided you swear to me that we will be allowed to depart in peace."

"I swear it to you by the love I bear my sister!"

"Your sister—who?"

"That unconscious girl calls me brother—when she knows me."

"And you would sell her to your Mormon chief?"

"No! Never! You do not know the laws, the iron laws, that bind us. I am but a tool, an instrument, that he uses as he sees fit. I see but one way of escape for my sister, and that is for you to cure her and escape with her."

"It would be useless, in her present helpless condition, to attempt to fly now; cure her first—escape afterward."

It was Claren, the leader of the Mormon band that held Powell as prisoner, with whom the doctor was talking as they rode down the incline that sloped to the valley where the main band was camped, and the revelation that this man was Ivy's brother gave Powell new hope that he might be able to free the girl from the toils that surrounded her.

So they rode into camp in silence, the compact between them being fully understood, when, in the absence of Welker, the Mormon leader, Claren took charge of details and assigned Powell to a tent where, under a strong guard, he was allowed to take some much needed rest until late in the day.

Ivy was taken to the center of the camp and made comfortable, and when Powell came to where she was in the care of some of the women, passing as he did so, his horse, Black Ben, who had been taken by Welker and turned over to

him, as no one else could ride him, the girl still lay unconscious and in a death-like stupor.

Powell had his instruments in his saddle-bags and had taken them with him, so, after giving a few terse directions, he began the operation, which lasted but a few moments, lifting up a small piece of the bone of the skull, where it rested on the brain and firmly securing it in place by strips of adhesive plaster.

As the morsel of bone was raised, Ivy gave a deep sigh, opened her eyes, gazed at Powell an instant, with a look of searching inquiry, looked about her for a moment and then, realizing as if by magic her surroundings, again sighed and turned away, nestled her head on her hand and sunk into a deep, calm, dreamless slumber that promised to last for hours, while Powell, turning to Claren, said in a low voice:

"The operation was successful, and by to-morrow or next day she will be in condition to travel."

"Then to-morrow, or next day, you will be free to go with her wherever you will, provided you return."

"I will return!" replied Powell, firmly, as he turned away and went back to his tent, where he replaced his instruments in their case, and then walked to where Black Ben was tethered near by, and spoke a few caressing words to him, the noble animal rubbing his muzzle affectionately against his arm and neighing joyfully.

But, as if in echo to the neigh came an answering one from off on the prairie, and looking, Powell saw the remainder of the Mormons, who had stayed to wreak their vengeance on the camp, riding toward them, and Claren riding out to report to Welker.

He watched them for a time, saw their greeting, saw Claren talk earnestly to Welker for a few moments, heard a shout of boisterous laughter, and then, with a sense of impending evil, turned to his tent again, re-entered it and, seating himself, was soon buried deep in thought.

He was roused from his meditations soon after by a summons from outside, and looking up, saw Welker and Claren standing there. He invited them to walk in and be seated, which invitation they accepted when Welker spoke.

"Claren tells me that you have successfully operated on Miss Carter's hurt."

Powell started and looked at Claren, who was smiling maliciously.

"So this, then, is the way you keep your oath," said Powell quietly.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Claren. "So you really believed that little romance about my dear sister! It was merely invented to induce you, my dear doctor, to exercise your skill, and contained not one word of truth."

"But your oath to me," insisted Powell, half-rising, and his face becoming set and stern with anger.

"I swore by a fictitious person, so the oath does not exist," laughed Claren.

There was a crash and a yell of pain, and Claren, struck fair between the eyes by a crashing blow, fairly flew out of the tent and went rolling over the ground as if shot out of a catapult.

And drawing himself up to his full height, Powell, pointing his finger at Welker, said in a scornful voice:

"Leave my tent, and thank your good fortune that I spare you!"

And Welker, rising, slunk out of the tent, cringing like a whipped hound, leaving the Magic Doctor master of the situation.

CHAPTER XI.

A KENTUCKY TARGET.

THE Mormons did not move for several days, but, their camping ground being an excellent one, with an abundance of wood and water and fine grass for the horses, lingered before starting across the stretch of arid land that lay between where they then were and the mountains.

During these days Powell went and came as he pleased, exchanging words with no one but the necessary phrases incidental to the care of Ivy, who was rapidly growing well and strong, and who, by dint of persistent questioning, had learned all that had happened during the time that elapsed between her fall and the moment when she realized consciousness in the Mormon camp.

Brave girl that she was, she had not yet abandoned her intention of escaping from the clutches of the Mormons at the first opportunity, and, realizing that in Powell she had a firm, reliable friend who feared no foe, would shrink from no danger, she felt for the present at rest and content to wait.

Their conversations were continually interrupted by the various spies set to watch their actions, and they could make no plans looking to their escape until the doctor managed to slip into her hands, unperceived, a note, suggesting that they had better wait until they reached the mountains before making any attempt, as on the open plains they would certainly be recaptured while she would find it difficult to subsist where he could easily live.

And the next time he saw her she handed him an answer which, after returning to his tent, he read hurriedly.

It was thus worded:

"Your ideas are correct. But if you can get away from this place, and I can reach the mountains, I can suggest a way out of our trouble. At 'Way-up Camp' I have a brother, who owns a mine there and who has a number of men working for him, who are devoted to him, and will 'fight to the death,' as he puts it, for him. If you can reach the camp, my brother, Frank Carter, would be able to raise men enough to wipe out this band and set me free. What do you think of this? We pass near 'Way-up,' when we cross the mountains."

"Brave girl," murmured Powell. "If her brother has but a small portion of her nerve, the rest will be easy."

"And now to lay my plans so as to lull suspicion and make it easier to escape."

So rising, after tearing Ivy's note into minute fragments, Powell sauntered out toward the spot where the ring of rifles notified him that the Mormons were engaged in their almost daily practice of shooting at a mark.

As Powell approached, Welker, who seemed to wish to be on amicable terms with his prisoner, turned to him and said:

"Doctor, we are trying our skill at yonder mark; will you not join us and take a hand in the shoot?"

"Why not?" replied Powell, carelessly, "provided I can have my own weapon."

"That of course. We are all using arms we are familiar with and don't wish to handicap you. Here is your rifle, and a good one it is, too, I should say, judging from what I have been able to accomplish with it."

Powell took the weapon with a feeling as if he had met an old friend, picked up a cleaning-rod that rested against a wagon near by, and carefully wiped out his gun, and then loaded from the horn and bullet-pouch that were handed him.

"What is the mark?" he asked, as he turned to Welker who still stood near.

"That ramrod stuck in the ground a hundred paces off yonder."

"It seems a pity to spoil a good ramrod," continued Powell, as he glanced in the direction indicated.

"Well, it is necessary to hit it before spoiling it," laughed Welker, "and although we have made some pretty good shots, as you can see by the barrel behind it, none of us has yet been able to splinter the ramrod."

"Do you think you can?"

"It is a pity, as I said before, to spoil it. Wait and I will suggest a better mark."

Handing his rifle to Welker, Powell, picking up the cleaning-rod he had just used, walked off toward the target, followed by two or three of the shooters, interested in what he was about to do, among whom was Claren, whose bandaged head added considerably to his natural repugnance.

"I don't want no trouble with you, Doc," he said, as they paced over the green sward, "an' know that I was wrong t'other day. But all is fair, ye know, in war, an' we war ag'in' each other."

And he laughed as though he labored under the impression that he had made an excellent pun.

"All right," answered Powell, persisting in his attempt to lull suspicion by remaining on friendly terms with every one. "Let bygones be bygones, and we will say no more about our trouble."

"All right, Doc. I'm willin'."

By this time they had reached the barrel, where Powell, taking the cleaning-rod he had brought with him, stuck it in the ground alongside the ramrod that had served as a mark, and half an inch from it, securing the two at the top by tying a small piece of wood across from one to the other.

Then taking a bullet from his pouch, he cut a crease around it and tied a piece of thread about the bullet.

The crowd watched him intently, and when he stooped over and tied the other end of the string to the cross-piece, exclamations arose on every side.

"What are you going to do?" asked Claren,

unable any longer to restrain his curiosity as he watched the proceedings.

"Wait and see," replied the doctor, as he finished attaching the bullet so that it hung between the upright ramrod and cleaning-rod, and about three inches below the cross-piece.

Then, leaving the bullet dangling there, Powell, turning to Welker, who just then came up, said:

"There! That's the sort of mark we used to shoot at back in Kentucky. Do you think you can hit it?"

"What's the idea? To hit the bullet from back yonder? You must be crazy! A man couldn't see it, let alone hitting it."

"No, I don't want you to hit the bullet."

"What then?"

"To cut the string between bullet and cross-piece, and let the bullet drop down between the two sticks!"

A shout of derision went up at these words, while Powell, quiet, smiling, calm and confident, looked about him.

"Well," said Claren, "of all the fool propositions I ever heard of, that is the foolihest."

"You think so," returned Powell, still smiling.

"Then, Mr. Claren, I will prove to you that you are mistaken."

And turning, he walked back to the score, while the news having spread through the camp of the wonderful feat their prisoner was about to attempt, the Mormons came hurrying from every direction.

CHAPTER XII.

WON!

THERE was considerable of a crowd gathered about Powell ten minutes after he had made his startling proposition, and more than one of the men walked to the mark, eyed it critically, and paced the distance between target and score carefully.

"A hundred even paces," remarked one of the men, after he had satisfied himself by several trials that the distance was correct.

"And the man that can hit that mark—can cut that string—from here, can win all the money that I have got in the world or ever expect to have."

"You're shouting now, Jake," chimed in one of the bystanders, "an' I say the same thing."

"Tell ye what I'll do, Doc," he continued confidentially:

"I'll bet ye ten to one that you can't do it in fifty shots, an' if ye want to, I'll give you a hundred trials."

"An' I'll bet," chipped in another tough-looking specimen, "that it's all a great big bluff, and that the Magic Doctor can't hit ther barrel that sets behind the mark."

At this sarcasm there was another yell from the crowd, but Powell stood as imperturbable as ever, leaning on his rifle and surveying the crowd of excited men with a pitying smile.

At length, as the jeers continued, he spoke:

"I never wager money on what I am about to attempt," he said, "and I have no need of your dollars, so let us say no more about betting."

"That's right, Doc, weaken, crawfish, turn tail an' run!" yelled the bully of the crowd. "Never back your opinion ef yer ain't sure o' winnin'."

Contemptuously the doctor turned to him and spoke:

"I said that I never wagered money on the result of anything that I am going to do, but to show you how much I am in earnest I'll make this little affair interesting."

"Here is my watch," and he drew from his pocket a magnificent five thousand-dollar chronometer that had been presented to him by a millionaire citizen of St. Louis, whose life he had saved by a wonderful surgical operation, after all surgeons had abandoned the case in despair.

"I will hang this watch below yonder bullet with a second string, and then shoot. If I fail to cut the string my watch is yours, my doubting friend, and if I drive the bullet through the watch the loss is mine."

"I take all the risk, and you none."

"Now, will you shut up, at least until the trial takes place?"

And without waiting for an answer, he walked back to the target, hung his watch just below the bullet, and rested the latter in the ring to which the chain was attached.

And then returning, he said:

"The string will be cut without disturbing the bullet, and, after I have fired, you will find the bullet resting in the ring and the cord severed."

"If you do that you're ould Hawkeye him-

self," muttered some admirer of Cooper's novels, who seemed intensely interested.

"Worse than him," added another literary vagabond.

"Leatherstocking never attempted such a feat, and as the doctor has such nerve, I hope he won't smash his watch. It is dollars to cents that he won't come anywhere near the mark, though."

Frank Powell seemed to be so perfectly confident, had so little of the bluster of the "bluffer" about him, was so well known on the plains, that a few of the spectators began to be imbued with a belief in his skill, and ventured small bets on the result, asking and receiving tremendous odds.

And soon the excitement reached such a pitch that every one in the crowd, except Powell, was at fever-heat, and bets were made on every side.

Money, clothes, horses, weapons, watches, jewelry, everything possessing any value whatever, was recklessly staked for or against Powell's winning, while numerous voices entreated him from time to time to defer the trial until all bets had been booked.

An epidemic of gambling seemed to have struck the camp, and men ran hither and thither in every direction, collecting whatever of value they possessed, until there remained scarcely a dollar's worth of personal property in the camp unstaked on the result.

And now Powell, realizing that this was to be a supreme test and that, win or lose, he was bound to make some bitter enemies, drew the charge he had placed in his rifle, cleaned it as carefully as if his life depended on the shot and then picked up the powder-horn that lay at his feet.

Carefully he measured out the charge, grain by grain, carefully he poured it into the brown barrel, and then, opening his pouch he took out his bullets and examined them scrupulously, discarding them, one by one, until he found one that was perfectly round and free from flaw or roughness.

And finally he selected a greased patch, laid it across the muzzle, placed the bullet thereon, and raising the ramrod was about to ram home, when a light touch was laid on his arm and a soft voice said:

"Doctor, use this for a patch; it may bring you luck."

And turning he saw his fair patient standing there, holding a delicate piece of material that she had torn from the scarf about her neck.

And taking it with a low bow, Powell fitted it over the bullet and rammed the morsel of lead firmly home.

Then cocking and capping his weapon he stepped to the mark, looked about him, and as a deep silence fell on all he raised the weapon, while all eyes were bent on the mark.

Slowly the rifle rose until it stood straight out from his shoulder, stopped, and wavering no more than the Rock of Gibraltar, man and weapon seemed as if carved out of marble, so still were they.

A second's pause, and then the flame leaped from the barrel, the report rung out, and in echo came a cheer that fairly rent the air.

The bullet had sped true, the cord had been cut, and resting in the ring of the watch lay the released piece of lead that a moment before hung dangling.

Frank Powell had made good his boast!

CHAPTER XIII.

ARRIVALS.

THE turmoil and confusion that followed the result of the shot would have put to blush a crowd of toughs wrangling over a dog-fight, and in many instances disputants came to blows over their wagers.

But at last quiet was restored and the winners exultant, the losers sullen, the crowd gathered about Powell and begged him to give them some further exhibitions of his skill, although there was not a man present who dared pit himself against the Magic Doctor.

But Powell declined to gratify the aroused curiosity of the crowd, and after securing his watch, sat down beside Ivy Carter, and watched with an amused smile the matches that then took place between some of the various miners, the stakes being small, but as much feeling being shown as if the wagers amounted to thousands of dollars.

"If they keep on wrangling," said Frank to his fair companion, "I am in hopes that the affair will result as did the famous one between the Kilkenny cats."

"And what was that, doctor?" asked Ivy, languidly, yet with a faint smile as she endeavor-

ed to appear interested in the doctor's efforts to arouse her from her despondency.

"The cats fought—two of them—until there was not the slightest trace left of either of the combatants."

"And you hope—"

"I can't say I hope; but I do wish that that crowd of slave-dealers would get to fighting and wipe each other completely out, so that there would not be one of them left to tell the tale."

"But there is no hope of that, I fear, and we must bide our time as patiently as we can."

"Yes; and I pray, night and day, that the time may soon come."

"Patience yet a little while, Miss Ivy, and remember the old proverb: Everything comes to those who wait."

"I have much confidence, doctor, since you came to my rescue, and more faith in the future than I have had for many weary days."

"Thanks for your trust, and believe me when I say that all will yet come out as you would wish."

"But what is that noise?" he continued as the crowd for a moment became silent as it watched a particularly decisive shot that one of the competitors in a close match was about to attempt.

"I hear nothing unusual."

"Listen! It sounds as if some one were playing a banjo out on the prairie behind that rise."

"True, I hear it now. What can it mean? for it is the first time I have heard any music about the camp."

"I will walk in that direction and see, if you feel strong enough to accompany me."

"Certainly, if we do not go far."

So, rising, they wandered away, nobody apparently paying any particular attention to them, although it was evident that more than one watchful eye was upon him.

But the Mormons feared no attempt at escape, out on the prairie as they were, with no chance to avoid the pursuit that would instantly be made if the prisoners attempted to flee.

As they reached the brow of the roll in the plain, they both stopped with an exclamation of surprise, for the same tableau met their eyes that had greeted One-Armed Oll a few days before.

Eph and Zeke were the figures in the tableau, and it was the latter who was producing the not inharmonious sounds that had struck Powell's quick ear without attracting the attention of the Mormons.

At the sight of Powell and Miss Carter the older negro motioned to Zeke to stop his strumming, but with his "eyes in fine frenzy rolling" the youngster was so wrapped up in his music that he saw nothing but his fingers, heard nothing but the sounds from his instrument.

And Old Eph got mad.

Fetching the industrious young musician a clip on the ear that sent him rolling over and over half a dozen yards away, the old man muttered:

"Stop dar, Zeke, I tole you. Unless you ceases dat pestiferous music, I done tole Miss Ivy not ter speak ter yer, an' dat'll fix you, shore!"

Rubbing his head, yet grinning with delight at the sight of Miss Carter, Zeke picked himself up, and still holding on to his banjo with one hand executed several cart-wheels and tumbles that would not have disgraced a professional athlete, and then came bounding up the hill toward Powell and the young lady, while Eph called after him in vain.

"Oh, Miss Ivy, 'deed an' I'se glad to see you, safe an' soun' once more," shouted the boy, wild with delight, as he throw himself at her feet and fairly kissed the hem of her dress in the exuberance of his joy.

"An' so is I, young missie," added Old Eph, wheezingly, hurrying up as fast as his rheumatic limbs would permit, and grasping the hand that Miss Carter held out to him.

"Where did you come from?" asked Powell, recognizing the two from what the girl had told him of them, "and how comes it that you are strumming around the camp like a pair of wandering minstrels?"

"Oh, we plays fur to be shuah dat no one aint goin' ter shoot us," explained the old man, apologetically, "fer when dey heers de music dey know dat our 'tentions am peaceable an' 'ones'."

"A sort of a flag of truce, I see," said Powell, smiling.

"But where do you come from and how did you find the camp?"

"We has been trailin' you fer some time, an' Massa Oll done sent us to see you an' 'splain."

"Oll? Who is he? and what is there to explain?"

"Massa Oll am de one-arm man you donesave

from bein' hung, an' he sent us here ter tell you dat he am on de lookout and trabelin' roun'."

"W'en you moves, he air gwine ter move an' try an' help you 'scape."

"A good friend he will be when need comes."

"But as you have not been seen by any of the Mormons, go and come into the camp on the other side."

"Say nothing to me, and when the time comes I will give you a message to carry to Oll."

"All right, boss. Good-by, missy, we'll be jest as surprised to see you later on as ef we hadn't seen yer in a hull week."

And as the negroes retraced their steps, Powell and Ivy Carter turned and went back to the shooting-ground, where their short absence had created no comment whatever.

As for the negroes, they had not even been seen by any of the Mormons.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHALLENGE.

LATE that night Powell and the two negroes might have been found in earnest conversation, and the purport of it seemed decidedly interesting, judging from the way their heads were close together, and from their earnest tones, pitched so low that no passer-by could have distinguished one word from another.

Finally the trio separated, their plans all arranged, and the camp sunk to slumber, guarded by the sentinels, who stood like statues at intervals, or paced slowly to and fro.

With the morning came bustle and confusion, for during the evening news had been spread about the camp of a race between some of the crack steeds that were owned by different members of the band.

Eph and Zeke came wandering up to where a party of men were discussing the preliminaries of the race, and much was the surprise shown by all, many were the exclamations that arose on every side.

"Where did you niggers come from?" asked Welker, stepping out from the crowd.

"We thought that you were dead, and eaten by the coyotes, sure."

"Oh, no, boss," answered Zeke, bobbing his woolly head. "We don't git los' so easy. We done got strayed, and had some trouble findin' you all, but Eph, here, got on de trail, an' here us iz."

"Well, tumble about, and help get breakfast."

"Any one who sails with our fleet of prairie schooners, must work his passage, or go overboard."

"All right, boss. We kain't swim, and doesn't want to drown, does us, Zeke?" and the old man showed every one of his glistening white teeth as he threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"Deed we doesn't, an' I understan's that there is mos' as many sharks on lan' as in the sea, an' they'd nip a leg offen a young nigger like me quicker'n wink," and Zeke joined in the laugh that followed as if he really enjoyed the idea.

The old man and the boy were thoroughly versed in the culinary art, and the appetizing odor from the frying antelope steaks, and cuts from juicy round of buffalo soon filled the air and whetted to a yet keener edge the appetites of those who did not know what it was to be without an appetite.

"Doctor," said Welker, when they were seated around the appetizing board. "I think that horse of yours ought to be a runner—how is it?"

"Well," replied Powell, his mouth full of juicy steak, in as indifferent a tone as he could command, for everything was turning out precisely as he would have wished, "well, he can run a little, and I doubt if his equal can be found in your whole herd."

"Maybe no, and maybe yes," returned Welker. "My horse, Blaze, with my boy, Mervin, Jr., on his back, is thought to be about the best piece of horseflesh in the camp, and I think he can beat your nag at a distance of a mile, or even two—or make it four, if you wish—for anything you care to name."

"My remark of yesterday as to never wagering money on any result still holds," answered Powell, "but you've got a pretty decent sort of a horse there, and I shouldn't mind owning him; so I'll tell you what I'll do, Mr. Welker."

"I'll let young Zeke here ride my horse against yours—distance, four miles—winner to take the loser's horse." How does that proposition strike you?"

Before Welker could answer, Claren spoke up:

"You're dead sure ter win, Merv. Yer boy's

a wonder at ridin', an' thar hain't no boss this side o' Kentuck thet kin beat yourn. Ef ye don't make the race ye'r a durned fool, fer ye'r sho' ter win, an' ther Doc's boss air a-wu'th hev'n'."

Whatever doubt still lingered in Welkin's mind was dispelled by Claren's words for the former had implicit confidence in his subordinate whenever a question of this sort arose, and so, without any further comment, he rose from the table, looked around for his boy, and calling him, turned to the doctor as he reseated himself, and said:

"It's a race, doctor."

His son appeared in a few minutes, and immediately, in response to a word from his father, threw off his coat and prepared to weigh against Zeke.

"We don't want any advantage on either side, doctor," said Welker, "and we'll make the boys ride even."

Nothing could be fairer than this proposition, and Zeke was called, when, a rude scale being improvised, the white boy was found to outweigh Zeke by five or six pounds, and it was agreed that Zeke should be weighted with that amount of lead.

And then came the question of the track—the most important of all; but this was quickly solved by the volunteering of a member of the party to stake out a mile course, he being a practical surveyor, and having his theodolite and chain with him, yet as this was a work which would take some little time to perform, by mutual consent it was agreed to postpone the trial of speed for two days, in order to allow the surveyor ample time to complete his labors. Old Eph, in response to a look of interrogation from Powell, when the suggestion was made, nodded his head mysteriously and vigorously, yet in a manner that seemed perfectly satisfactory to his mute questioner.

Having finished his breakfast, and having been put on parole for three days by Welker that he would not attempt to escape, Powell, followed by Old Eph and young Zeke, hurried over to the place where his horse was tethered, taking saddle and bridle and blanket with him.

"Can that boy ride, Eph? You told me he could, but are you sure he can ride for a man's life, for a girl's honor, for his own safety?"

"Dat boy, Massa Frank, kin ride anyt'ing dat's got hide or ha'r. Dat young niggah wuz riz on a farm an' useter ride fore'n he c'uld walk. Oh, yes, Massa Powell, he kin ride, don't you fear."

"How is it, Zeke, do you think you can manage Black Ben?"

"Kin I? Look hyar, Massa Frank, you jes' go'n' ast Missy Ivy ef I kin ride."

"By George I will," cried Powell, "for if this scheme fails I do not know what we are to do next. I will ask her, for while I do not doubt your word, Zeke, nor yours, Eph, this is too important a matter to take any chances on. You wait here, and I will soon come back."

And leaving the two negroes, he hurried away to where Miss Carter was standing alone, and evidently expecting him.

CHAPTER XV.

PREPARATIONS.

THE conversation with Ivy seemed to have been entirely satisfactory, for Powell soon returned and calling out to the younger of the two negroes, said:

"You are to be my jockey, Zeke, and Miss Carter has sent you a sash to wear as her colors."

This was said loudly in view of the fact that by this time quite a crowd of men had gathered about the two negroes, for it was generally understood that Powell was going to give his horse a practice gallop and that Zeke was going to essay his new mount for the first time.

Black Ben, with a superb disdain, had paid no attention to the throng that gathered about him, but continued methodically cropping the succulent grass until Powell's clear voice rung out on the air, when the horse, recognizing his master's tones at once, raised his head, looked in the direction of the place where Powell stood and whinnied delightedly.

"A fine horse, that," Mister Powell, remarked more than one of the crowd, as Frank stood by the animal, which raised its head and laid its muzzle caressingly on its master's shoulder, enjoying the touch and voice that it knew so well.

"Yes, an' he's like a brother to me," said the doctor, "and no one else has ever ridden him."

"I don't know, Zeke, whether he'll let you ride him or not."

"Reckon he'll have ter, boss," grinned the

imp, as he busied himself about saddle-cinch and bridle.

"Well, we'll see," said Powell, and, taking the boy by the ankle, he lifted him easily and readily into the saddle.

"Now, ride him off over the prairie for a quarter of a mile or so at a slow trot, to warm him up, and gradually increase your speed until you let him do his best—" and then in an undertone he added, "Don't urge him; he will go fast enough to make these fellows think he is doing his best, but he won't stretch himself until he hears me yell."

"All right, boss," replied the jockey, and giving a cluck of the most approved style, he loosened the rein and Black Ben walked off in a stately manner, the crowd shouting with laughter at the ludicrous position assumed by the boy, it being the reverse of the firm seat and confident attitude of the professional jockey.

And seeing how awkward the lad was, Powell's face clouded slightly, for his horse was at stake and in a close race victory depends as much on the rider as on the horse.

But it was too late to back down now, for it was understood that either party declining to race would forfeit the stakes and even if Zeke were a miserable rider the effort must be made, as Powell would not relinquish his horse without a struggle.

But at this moment Eph sidled up to him, and under cover of the attention that everyone was paying to Zeke, whispered a few words to the Magic Doctor that appeared to relieve him immensely, for his face cleared up and, stepping forward he gave a low, melodious whisper at the sound of which Black Ben pricked up his ears and moved off at a rapid trot.

And now his rider became more grotesque than ever, for arms and legs flew wildly about, his cap, tattered to rags, fell to the ground and the boy bobbed up and down in his seat like a wagon on a corduroy road and the faster the horse moved the more the lad seemed uncomfortable and ill-at-ease.

"Air thet nigger a-goin' ter ride yer animile, Doc?" asked one of the onlookers.

"I am afraid he is," replied Powell. "It is the agreement and I can not change my rider without forfeiting the race, though if I had known what a botch Zeke was going to make of it, I think I would have ridden the race myself, heavy as I am. But it is too late to object now, and the matter 'll have to stand as it is."

"Then I'll bet yer thet Merv. Welker's boss beats your critter clean out in ther race tomorrow."

"Ye're safe bettin' thet, Chris," chimed in another of the bystanders, "fur it's dollars ter gimlet-holes thet Welker's animile 'll leave thet critter a-standin' still, 'ith ther nigger on his back."

"It air fifty to one on ther bay."

"Scuse me, gemmens; am de 'bay' Massa Welker's boss!"

And Old Eph, hat in hand, stood bowing alongside the last speaker, humility expressed in every move.

"Yas!" snarled the man addressed. "But w'ot dif'rents kin it make to you?"

"Nuthin', gemmens, nuthin'. But ef you is a-willin' ter bet wif an ole niggah w'ot's got a leetle money saved up—an' Massa Powell hyar kin hol' de stakes—I se de man 'll bet twenty dollars on de black boss ag'in' fifty times dat on de bay."

A thousand dollars risked to win twenty seemed too much odds when the time came for putting the money up; but the former speaker offered to wager a hundred dollars to twenty, and this bet the old negro accepted with alacrity as he did four others, making one hundred dollars he had bet, on which, in the event of Black Ben's winning, he stood to win five hundred—Frank Powell holding the stakes and seeing that no attempt was made to defraud the old man.

This action on Eph's part convinced Powell more strongly than anything else could that what the old dandy had said about Zeke as a rider was true, and that he had nothing to fear from his rider.

And he began to realize that there had been some understanding of the sort between the two negroes, for at this moment Zeke came up at a sharp run, and Old Eph stepping forward and waving his hat, the boy's attitude changed as if by magic; he straightened himself up, his feet fitted themselves to the stirrups as if they had grown there, and his whole attitude bespoke the thorough rider and professional jockey.

And the horse seemed to realize that the rider

was familiar with his business, for without any urging he bounded off at increased speed, and with a stride and action that caused some of his late detractors to shake their heads dubiously and determine to "hedge," while one of the men expressed his opinion frankly and loudly.

"Ther young nigger bez been foolin' an' purtendin' ez how he didn't know how ter ride! Look how he lif's ther boss. Gosh-a-mi'ty! I'm blamed ef I don't think thet Merv. 'll hev ter make his critter crawl ter keep ahead o' thet one!"

"But I be still a-bettin' on ther bay, an' ain't a-goin' ter weakin' yit."

And he strolled away, full of boasts and brag-gadocio, until out of hearing of the group, when he hastened to a distant part of the camp and proceeded to hedge with cautious diligence and due secrecy.

After giving him a good breathing, Zeke rode Black Ben into the camp, where he was rubbed down and carefully blanketed by the two negroes, who grinned as they confessed to Powell that it was all a put-up job, and that it was for the purpose of getting bets that Zeke had pretended awkwardness.

And the next day the horse was given another run and again carefully groomed, and when night came it was understood that the two negroes should watch alternately.

CHAPTER XVI.

A STRATEGICAL RACE.

THE night passed quietly, owing, in all probability, to the careful watch kept by the two negroes, for once or twice a stealthy figure came gliding toward them through the gloom, but was halted by a warning from one of the watchers, and any attempt to "hocus" the horse made futile.

So, when morning dawned, Black Ben was fit to run for a man's life and looked the very picture of strength, endurance and speed, so that his early visitors were more and more impressed with his appearance, and the betting became decidedly spirited and feeling ran high in the camp of the Mormons.

Chafing as he was under the restraint imposed upon him, Powell restrained himself during all these days solely on Ivy's account, realizing that it would only be through strategy that he could rescue her from her guards and restore her to that freedom for which she longed so ardently.

Along toward ten o'clock the excitement grew intense and as that was the hour when Welker and Powell were to meet to conclude all arrangements, the crowd surged toward the center of the camp and surrounded the table where the two principals sat and on which lay the paper on which the conditions of the race were drawn up.

The surveyor was there, and, in response to an interrogation from Welker, replied that he had laid out the wide course as carefully as he could, and that it had been properly staked and marked by a double line of posts.

And then the starter and judges were selected, Powell being assured of fair play and being allowed to select, as one of the judges, a young fellow who had been particularly friendly, and who was loud in his determination to see that his man had fair play.

So, everything having been satisfactorily arranged and Welker having offered his hand to Powell with the remark "If you win, doctor, my horse is yours," and the grasp having been returned by Powell, who, however, was not at all deceived by this friendly assumption of honesty, the two men withdrew from the crowd, Welker walking one way, followed by his son and Claren while Powell walked off with Eph and Zeke.

"Cap," said Claren to Welker, as they walked away from the crowd, "you'll eggscuse me ef I say thet I allers tuk you fur a smartish sort of a feller; but now I'm decided thet ye're a livin' chump, a bloomin' ijeet."

"Yes?" returned the other quietly, "and for what reason have you changed your opinion?"

"W'y, heer ye air, a-reskin' yer boss by runnin' him erg'in'st Powell's, w'en ye mou't 'a' tuk ther doctor's boss an' hed 'em both."

"Yes; and when we get to the city, I'd have had to turn him in as captured property, and not had a chance to get him without paying a big price; but now if I win him, why—he's mine, isn't he?"

"Thet's true; but ef ye lose?"

"Then I stand exactly where I do now, don't you see?"

"See! In course I sees, an' it's me ez is ther chump, Cap," admiringly continued Claren, "ye're a dandy an' no mistake."

"Well," replied Welker, with an assumption

of modesty, "I try to make a winning once in a while and sometimes play the correct card."

"And now if you'll step one side I want to give my boy his instructions about riding this race."

And as Claren, still beaming with admiration at this new proof of his chief's strategy, withdrew, Welker continued, speaking to his son, who listened attentively:

"Run Blaze from the word 'Go!' Get as much of a start as you can and hold it from post to finish. Use whip and spur as much as you like during the last mile, but do not touch the horse once before that."

"Now go and get ready and good luck go with you."

And then they walked back to where "Blaze" was standing, surrounded by a crowd of his admirers.

Meanwhile Powell, who had strolled off in the opposite direction, said to Zeke, who caught every word uttered:

"Mind, Zeke, this is to be a waiting race; no urging, no whipping, no spurring. Keep close behind the other horse—Black Ben will do that without being told—and when you pass the judges' stand for the last mile and you hear a peculiar yell, loosen everything and give Ben his head—do you understand thoroughly?"

"Puffeckly, boss, puffeckly."

"Yer kin depen' on de boy, Massa Pow'll. He done hed too menny d'reckshuns f'om ol' massa to make no mistakes, hain't ye sonny?"

"D'at I hez, an' I hain't a-goin' ter mek' no mistakes dis yar time."

And Powell, more and more confident, also returned to the camp and led the way to Black Ben's headquarters.

The prairie made a splendid course, and the line of stakes that stretched in an oval line marked as fine a mile track as the most ardent horseman could wish.

The entire camp was out in full force, and as young Welker rode onto the course, astride of Blaze, a yell of encouragement went up from his admirers and backers that encouraged the lad and caused the horse to curvet as proudly as if he had already won.

And then came Zeke, sitting on Black Ben as if he were part of the horse, and to him Powell advanced and whispered one last phrase which bore a mysterious injunction to the lad.

"Remember: win your race, dismount and be weighed, mount again and let the horse run away with you—using your spurs—and tell him to hold the scarf close to the fire, but as he loves life, not to burn it!"

And he nodded as he leaned over as if to adjust his stirrup and then rode away without uttering a word.

Riding up to the judges, a belt, heavy enough to equalize the weights of the two riders, was strapped about Zeke's waist and then the two lads rode down the stretch a couple of hundred yards, looked at each other and then came on slowly at first, but rapidly increasing their speed, until, when opposite the judges' stand they were nose and nose, and the "Go!" rung out unanimously, for a prettier start was never made.

And then, like an arrow from a bow, Blaze shot forward at a word from his driver and covered the ground like a meteor while a cry of admiration rung out from the crowd; but was quickly hushed as Black Ben, increasing his stride without being urged, reached the flank of the bay horse and, apparently regulating his speed by the other's, hung there tenaciously and would not be shaken off.

"Round the track they flashed, the bay horse increasing his speed as they came up the home stretch, but being unable to shake off Black Ben, who hung on his flank like Fate, and thus they finished the first mile."

The second mile was a repetition of the first and the third ran in exactly the same manner; but as the horses passed the stand and entered the fourth and last mile, Welker threw up his hand in signal to the watching lad, and immediately whip and spur were applied and all of the bay horse's latent energies being awakened, he fairly flew over the turf, leaving Black Ben a dozen yards in the rear, while a yell went up from a hundred throats, "Blaze wins! Blaze wins!"

But at that moment Powell gave a cry that sounded far above the shouts of the crowd and Black Ben, pricking up his ears, and apparently without effort, gathered his legs beneath him, gave a mighty bound, spurned the earth beneath his hoofs and in three strides caught the bay, in three more passed him and then, for the first time bursting into racing speed, increased the distance by which he led until, when he entered

the home stretch, Blaze, lashed into lather and spurred till the blood streaked his sides, was left a quarter of a mile in the rear, and Black Ben centered under the line, his rider winning with hands down, the horse being, apparently, as fresh as ever, while Blaze was dead beaten out.

And Zeke, nimbly dismounting, ran to the scales and was weighed, while the crowd, mad with excitement, yelled itself hoarse.

CHAPTER XVII.

CLAREN'S SCHEME.

THERE were a few men in the crowd who had wagered their money on Black Ben, and it was through their intervention that Zeke was saved from injury and possible death, as he stood quietly saddling his horse, after having weighed.

The decision of the judges had been unanimous, and indeed there was no other course left open to them, and every one admitted that there was no comparison between the horses, and that Black Ben was as far the superior of Welker's Blaze, as the latter was better than any other horse in the camp.

Welker, still keeping up the farce and professing a friendly spirit that it is certain he did not feel, came up to Powell immediately after the finish and again shook hands with him.

"My horse is yours, doctor, and I see now that I never had a chance of beating you."

"You can order your man Eph"—for by common consent it seemed to be agreed that the two negroes were the property of the doctor—"to take Blaze into his care, for he is yours."

"Keep your horse, Mr. Welker," replied Powell, cordially. "I have no use for two, and you need not be ashamed of Blaze. He gave Black Ben a good deal to do during the first three miles and there are few that can beat him."

"Well, I am proud to have raced my horse against Ben, doctor, and if you ever want to dispose of your nag, let me have the first chance, will you?"

"Yes; if I ever do wish to sell him, which is not likely."

Whatever else might have been said was interrupted by the scattering of the crowd about Black Ben, who began to rear and plunge and thrash out with his hind hoofs in the most unaccountable manner; Zeke, who had remounted and who still wore his white scarf, sticking on like a leech.

Powell started for his horse, but before he could reach him Black Ben, with a furious snort lashed out once more and then, taking the bit in his teeth gave two or three leaps into the air, and then tore out over the prairie, the boy yelling with fear and the white scarf floating out behind like a signal of distress.

"What on earth is the matter with him?" asked Welker, who was watching the fast disappearing animal with a vexation he could not conceal.

"I can't imagine," replied Powell. "I never knew him to act so before. The blanket was thrown on the grass and maybe a spine of prickly pear stuck to it and irritated him when the boy mounted."

"But Zeke is a good rider and will probably bring him back all right."

And Powell, looking once more in the direction where horse and horseman had disappeared over the rise in the prairie, turned and walked toward Miss Carter, who stood not far away, looking somewhat worried, but apparently realizing that there was nothing to be done but to wait.

"I'll send my boy after him on Blaze, doctor, if you think—"

"Blaze is utterly done up and you saw what a pace Ben set when he ran away. Even if your horse were fresh, by the time your son got to the rise Zeke would probably be out of sight."

"No, no! He will probably run some distance and then Zeke will obtain control of him and fetch him back all right."

And then he joined Ivy, who, noticing that there was no one within earshot, said:

"Beautifully done, was it not, doctor?"

"It was indeed; the boy is as smart as a whip."

"And do you think he will find him?"

"Judging from the way he has started out I should say he would."

"But let us talk no further on this subject; your excitement may be remarked and cause unpleasant comment."

"Zeke will probably not return before tomorrow and all we can do is to wait patiently and hope for the best."

"Patience is most essential just now, for in any case your rescue must be long delayed, and by keeping up hope and courage you will also keep up your strength."

"Will you not try?"

"I will, doctor," said the girl, bravely, "but it is very hard."

And turning away, she wiped from her cheek the few tears that had forced themselves from her eyes, vowing that they should be the last she would shed in the Mormon camp.

Meanwhile, Claren, who now coveted the possession of Powell's horse, as he had probably never coveted anything before, during his long career of crime, and who saw an opportunity of obtaining possession of him by riding after overtaking, getting rid of—by killing, if necessary—Zeke, hurried away to the herd, saddled his horse and taking his rifle, started out over the prairie in a direction opposite to that taken by Black Ben in his wild flight over the plain.

Welker saw, and called out to him, but the Mormon was prepared and replied that he was going out for a little hunt after fresh meat, and that he would not remain long absent.

So, setting spurs to his horse, he soon disappeared over the rise which hemmed in the camp on east and west, and then rode rapidly south, intending, when he had gotten some miles from the locality, to circle and endeavor to strike the trail left by the hoofs of Black Ben.

And so he rode on until well out of sight of any inquisitive member of the band, and then, turning his horse's head to the right, galloped steadily westward, for a time gradually veering to the north in the expectation of striking the course over which Zeke had traveled.

He was some six miles to the southwest of the camp, and riding in a northwesterly direction, guiding himself by the sun, when he suddenly came upon the broad bed of a dry sand creek, the bottom of which was some ten feet below the level of the prairie, and the precipitous banks of which barred all further progress in that direction.

This he regarded with a feeling of satisfaction, for if it stopped him, it must also stop Black Ben, and all he had to do was to follow its course and he must strike the trail.

And at that moment his eye caught sight of a moving object some distance away, and looking steadily at it, he became convinced that it was coming toward him, and was, in all probability, Zeke mounted on Powell's horse, so, looking to his rifle, he dismounted and knelt behind a slight elevation, a cruel smile on his lips as he realized what he was about to do.

And all unconscious of the danger that threatened him, all unconscious of the impending fate, Zeke—for it was he—rode leisurely on, a perfect understanding seeming to exist between him and his horse.

And Claren waited, with finger on trigger.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MESSAGE.

THE apparently incomprehensible actions of Black Ben might easily have been explained by Zeke, had he had time and opportunity to inform the amazed crowd of the cause, but the horse had business in another direction, and Zeke, to carry out the well-arranged plan that Powell had conceived, must perforce go along.

Yet it was all simple enough: on remounting, the negro had inserted one of his spurs which he held in his hand, under the horn of the saddle, in such a manner that it irritated the horse without really hurting him, and caused all the manifestations of displeasure that he had displayed.

As soon as he was well out of sight of the camp, he removed the spur and had no difficulty in quieting Ben.

So Zeke rode quietly along, glancing back every little while to see if he was followed, and ready at any moment to begin his wild rush over the prairie by means of the spur, but no pursuer came in sight, and he rode steadily away from the camp until he, also, struck the creek, when he dismounted and waited for some time to make it perfectly certain that there were no spies near him or on his trail.

And it was this delay that gave Claren an opportunity to reach the sand creek before Zeke had ridden down past the point where the Mormon awaited him with murderous intent.

Utterly and entirely unconscious of any impending danger, Zeke rode along, his eyes fixed on a few tattered leaves that scarce hung together, the contents of which he was eagerly devouring; for on the stock-farm where he had been raised, Zeke's natural intelligence and brightness had attracted the attention of the mistress of the house, and she had taken care that his schooling was not neglected.

So Zeke rode along, Black Ben having pricked up his ears at the sight of the horse, but having paid no further attention to him, having become

accustomed to the presence of strange horses during his confinement in the Mormon camp.

And as Zeke came within range, Claren raised his weapon, glanced along the sights, aiming between the lad's eyes, and fell over, stone dead, as a puff of smoke flew from a point in the bed of the creek below him, and the crack of a rifle rung out of the still air, while Zeke, startled into a consciousness of his surroundings, straightened up with a jerk as Claren's bullet whistled harmlessly by him, the rifle having been discharged by his convulsive grasp as the Mormon plunged headlong to the bottom of the sand creek, shot to death by a bullet in the base of the skull.

"Ye'll l'arn, lad, ter keep a lookout fur skulkin' varmints, 'stead o' stickin' yer nose inter literature, ef ye hez one er two more 'periences like this 'un!" called out a voice to the startled boy, as the speaker stepped into view from under the overhanging bank and proceeded to leisurely reload his piece.

"W'ot am de matter, Massa Oll?" gasped Zeke, his eyes sticking out like well-rounded plums from a pudding.

"Nothin', 'ceptin' that ther Morming yonder hed a head drored on yer, an' 'u'd 'a' sout yer ter kingdom come ef I hedn't 'a' took a han' in ther game.

"But never min' him, he hain't a-goin' ter bother yer no more, only let this yar be a lessing to yer.

"W'ot news hez yer got from ther doctor, an' w'ot did he tell yer to do?"

"I tole him what you sed, an' that at the fu'st chance I war a-comin' out to this yar gully an' see ye, ez yer hed sed ez how ye knowed de ken-try, an' that thar war sech a gully.

"Den he 'lowed ez how he'd sen' ye a mes-sidge, an' hyar it am, writ on dis yar piece o' cloy."

And Zeke, untying the white scarf from his shoulders, tossed it to Oll, who caught it and turned it from one side to the other with an air of total perplexity.

"W'ot yer givin' me," growled the giant, evidently thinking that Zeke was enjoying himself at his expense, yet turning and twisting the scarf, looking in vain for hem or border wherein a note could be concealed.

"De doctor sed," explained Zeke, dismounting and allowing Ben to roam, while he seated himself on the edge of the bank, paying no attention to the body of Claren, that lay where it had fallen, while his horse cropped the grass near by.

"De doctor sed ez how ye wuz ter tek' ther scarf 'n' he't hit, takin' 'streme keer not ter burn hit, an' de words 'u'd 'peer, hit bein' a sort o' hyreoglifikilistic writin'."

Oll looked at him a moment as if doubtful of the result, but, thinking it evidently worth a test he knelt and blew into the embers of a lately-kindled fire of buffalo-chips, which soon glowed with an intense heat, yet gave out no smoke.

Then, holding the scarf close to the fire, yet not close enough to scorch it, he watched the result anxiously, and, much to his amazement the result came.

Slowly at fir t, but more rapidly as the heat penetrated the folds of the scarf, the fabric changed color in places and finally words grew into plain view, much to the astonishment of the amazed and thunder-stricken observer, who had never come in contact with sympathetic inks before.

The explanation was simple: Powell had written on the scarf with a colorless chemical that only needed the action of heat to bring it into view, which precaution rendered harmless the fact of the possible examination of the scarf by any one of the Mormons.

And this was what he had written, as Oll could easily read, warming the scarf from time to time, as the cooling of the fabric caused the letters to disappear again:

"At 'Way up you will find Frank Carter. Te'l him his sister is in Mormon power and to get help and prepare to rescue her as we reach the Pass. When we get there I will communicate with him. Ivy Carter is his sister's name. Take my horse and ride for the mountains. If you think you owe me a debt, you can pay it by saving this girl. Do not delay, but start at once, as the Mormons will soon break camp. Take no action, with Carter, to attack the Mormons until you hear from me, for they are capable of massacring us both if they think we are about to escape; their clutches. I will remain with this band until I see her freed from her bondage. Again I say 'Hasten!' and good luck attend you."

FRANK POWELL.

Without a word the giant covered up the embers of the fire, after having burned the scarf to cinders; without a word he scrambled to the

top of the bank, and, after pitching Claren's body into the bed of the creek, out of sight, he caught the horse that the Mormon had ridden and took off his saddle and bridle, replacing the latter by the lariat that hung at the saddle-born.

Then, mounting Powell's horse, after kicking saddle and bridle into the sand below, he, for the first time, spoke.

"Tell Frank Powell, that you see'd me mount an' ride away.

"Tell him that I'll ride to 'Way-up ez fas' ez man kin ride, an' thet ez long ez Oll hez life, he'll gi'n thet life to freein' ther gal an' ther doctor from ther devils w'ot hez 'em priz'ners."

And with no further word, with no sign of adieu, he turned to the south and struck off to a point where he could cross the sand creek, never once looking back to where he had left the boy standing, and soon disappeared from sight.

CHAPTER XIX.

BREAKING CAMP.

It was well on toward night when Zeke hobbled into camp, limping fearfully and looking as if he had encountered a thrashing machine and settled some long-standing difference opinion during his absence.

His clothes were torn and dusty and his whole aspect was one of utter misery and despair.

Almost the first person he encountered was Welker, who, seeing the state he was in, immediately suspected the true state of affairs and cried out angrily:

"Where is my horse, you black rascal?"

"I hain't see'd yer hors', 'deed I hain't, Massa Welker," stammered the boy.

"I don't mean my horse, exactly," said Welker, correcting himself. "I mean Doctor Powell's horse. What have you done with him?"

"I hain't done nothin' wif him, Massa Welker. All de doin' w'ot's been done, he done did to me."

"Quit your nonsense and tell me where he is, you imp—or—" and Welker looked as threatening as a mad overseer in slavery days.

"I spec' dat brack animile, Ben, am by dis time, well on his way to Californy, Massa Welker, an' dat am de troofol troof. He run aw'ile wid me, den he 'trowed me, den he roll me ober wid his nose, an' den he kick up he heels an', whoo-eel didn't him jes' mak' tracks ober de prairie! 'Clar' ter goodness, Massa Welker, he jes' flewed!"

"You don't tell me that he got away from you," cried Welker, wild with rage, for his anger had not been lessened by the taunts and jeers of which he had been the object, and he had an idea of showing his companions that "he could best laugh who wins," by taking the horse and claiming it as his own.

So he determined to wreak his vengeance on Zeke, and no one knows what the result would have been if Powell had not at that moment appeared and accosted Zeke.

"Well, Zeke, is Black Ben all right?" he said, evidently thinking his horse was corraled with the others.

"No, Massa Powell, he am all wrong. But 'deed an' 'deed, boss, it wa'an't my fault. 'Deed an' 'deed it wa'an't. Dat brack raskil he jes' frowed me ez easy ez he would eat a oat, an' he scampered off liken de win'. Don' scol', Massa Frank, fur I'se pow'ful sorry, I is."

"Black Ben lost!" cried Powell. "I would rather it had been my right arm."

"Never mind, doctor," said Welker, rather pleased than otherwise that Powell should feel his loss so keenly.

"I'll string this nigger up, an' I'll cut his heart out with a bull-whip."

"You will oblige me by taking no action whatever in the matter, Mr. Welker," replied Powell. "Ben is unused to the confinement of camp life, and has probably run away for a short time only. He is too well trained to go far."

"Then you think that he will return of his own free act?" asked Welker, more than pleased at the prospect of the attainment of his heart's desire.

"I think that there is but little doubt of it."

"Then I congratulate you, doctor, and as for you, Zeke, I'll let you off this time, at the doctor's request, but a repetition of the carelessness will be punished more severely than you can imagine."

"I'll be keerful, boss," cried Zeke as downcast as if the disappearance of Powell's horse were the result of accident rather than premeditation.

"But, doctor," said Welker, stopping and returning. "we break camp to-morrow and proceed on our journey; your horse is not likely to find and follow our trail, plain though it will be."

"No; but as we journey west, and he is now loose somewhere in that direction, we may come upon him all the sooner for that very reason."

And seeing that Powell's confidence was not to be shaken, Welker left them, when Zeke repeated, as nearly as he could recall them, the words that Oll had spoken, adding that he had immediately ridden away, and relating the tragic manner of Claren's death and his own narrow escape.

"A lucky thing for you, my lad, that Oll was on the lookout, or our plans might have miscarried totally. But now scatter, and say nothing to any one about your adventures."

Then leaving the boy, Powell proceeded to Ivy's tent, and, careful that he was not overheard, told her in as few words as possible, of the success of Zeke's mission and how Oll had accepted the trust.

He encouraged her to try and be patient until they had reached the mountains, showing how futile any present attempt to escape would be, and left her in a more hopeful frame of mind than she had experienced at any time since her recovery, and going immediately to his quarters, where, as well as the rest of the camp, he soon sunk to slumber.

And in the bright dawn of the early morning the preparations for moving began, and before the sun was an hour high, the entire body of the Mormons was on the move, and the line of wagons stretched, east and west, the long shadows pointing out the direction in which their destination lay.

In front rode the advance-guard, from time to time spurring their horses far out on the flanks of the slowly-moving body and reconnoitering in every direction, guarding against any possible attack from savage Indian dweller, or still more savage renegade white.

Much comment had been caused by the non-appearance of Claren, but as no Indian sign had been discovered in the neighborhood, and he was well-mounted and armed, no uneasiness was manifested, it being thought that he had wandered some distance away, too far to return to camp that night, and that he would follow on during the day.

But during one of the periodical reconnoiterings of the guides to the front and flank, the sand creek, in which Oll had lain concealed, was discovered, and the train having arrived at its banks, a halt was called until the road, which led down one side and up the other, could be repaired from the damage caused by recent rains.

And while they were resting, one of the men, riding down the creek bed with no definite object in view, discovered Claren's body, lying near some remains of a fire, his saddle and bridle near him.

The news hurriedly spread and Welker rode to the spot in hot haste, followed by Powell, who had a fresh mount, and many others, but nothing could be discovered regarding the manner of Claren's death.

It seemed probable that he had camped there for the night, and had been shot by some prowler of the plains, who did not care to burden himself with the useless saddle and bridle.

So the body having been given decent sepulture and the road being repaired, the train moved on, slowly and wearily winding its sinuous way to the West.

CHAPTER XX.

A CHAMPION.

FAR above the timber-line of one of the loftiest mountains of Colorado, one of the mighty peaks of the giant Rockies, grim guardians of the West, is situated the mining-camp of 'Way-up, or rather was, at the time of this tale, which contains far more fact than fiction.

The camp of 'Way-up was well named, and its sponsors in baptism must have had a certain amount of perceptible faculties to thus have lit upon a name that was at once so appropriate and so euphonious.

For it was "way up" in more than one sense of the word; "way up" as regards elevation, "way up" as regards wealth of surroundings, and "way up" as far as the toughness of its dwellers was concerned.

The name of "Way-up" among the miners, hunters, trappers and prospectors of what has since become the Centennial State, was synonymous with everything that was wild, reckless and in every way law-defying.

Not far from the camp was the "plantin' ground," as 'Way-up Bill, as he was called, facetiously denominated the graveyard or cemetery.

For Bill had not only started the "Nurery," or "Plantin' Ground," as it was indifferently termed, but had kept it in a state of perennial bloom, as was attested by the fact that he was

called indiscriminately, Bill, the Planter, or the Farmer, by his associates.

On the day in question, Bill was on the war-path, for it was yet early, and he had been taking in so much tanglefoot, conversation-water, or whatever else it may be called, that his legs had become decidedly unsteady, and in entering the famous saloon, "The Pick and Shovel," he had stumbled at the door-sill, and staggering forward, had measured his full length on the floor.

A general laugh arose among the few occupants of the saloon, for as Bill was lying face down, he could see none of them, and they thus dared laugh with impunity—something that they would not have dared to do had this terror of 'Way-up been facing them.

But in that crowd of saloon loafers was one who did not laugh, but who rather surveyed the prostrate man with a look of disgust, not unmixed with pity.

This exception to the general rule was a new arrival at 'Way-up, and was looked upon by the miners of that delectable village with pity and contempt—pity for his frail stature and boyish appearance—contempt because he invariably declined to join them in any of their brawls and dissipations.

And he was, in truth, but little fitted for either, judging from his appearance physically or mentally.

Slight beyond the usual slimness of youth, refined in face to a degree that was startling, when viewed in contrast with those about him, he was as much out of place amid these surroundings as a lamb among wolves—a fawn in a den of lions.

Yet it must not be judged from these comparisons that there was aught of fear in either look or bearing—on the contrary there was a haughty defiance in both manner and gaze that foreboded ill for any one who might attempt to bully or coerce him, and it was apparent to the most casual observer or onlooker that in case he was pressed, his ready hand would only too quickly spring to knife or revolver to defend himself.

But as 'Way-up Bill struggled vainly to rise, being almost helpless from the amount of liquor he had swallowed, the youth, taking pity on him, stepped forward, and grasping him by the shoulders, lifted him as he would a log and placed him in a chair, with an exhibition of strength that surprised every one who saw it.

Bill himself, drunk as he was, looked bewildered, and struggled in vain to fix the focus of his blinking eyes that he might assure himself that it was really young "Snipsey"—as the youth was called by the dwellers in 'Way-up.

Snipsey, having seated Bill in a convenient chair, resumed his nonchalant attitude, and looked scornfully at the waverling man who struggled to retain his equilibrium for a moment, and then toppled forward with a crash, again falling to the floor.

Rolling over on his back, he glared in the direction of Snipsey, and then, drawing a revolver from his belt, fired straight at the youth, whose life seemed sacrificed then and there, exclaiming at the same moment:

"I'll teach you, ye young cub, to shove me onto the floor."

But, stooping as rapidly as the weapon was drawn, the boy avoided the bullet, which whistled harmlessly over his head, and then sprung on the prostrate man and wrested the weapon from his grasp.

"Look here, Bill," he cried, "I've always treated you white; what do you want to do me dirt for that way?"

"You're drunk, so I'll let it pass; but remember this—twice you have tried to shoot me down, and now I tell you, the third time—look out! or it'll be all the worse for you."

"Wot you rakin' Bill fur, youngster?" interrogated a gruff voice, that proceeded from behind the stove, while a brawny, bearded man arose and came from the place where he had been dozing, half-concealed.

"Ye'r a puttin' on too many frills, an' Bill's a pard o' mine, so we'll jest gi'n you a leetle discipline."

And striding toward the youth, before the latter fully realized his intentions, the ruffian seized the slender arm of the lad in a grasp that made him wince with pain, and was raising his other hand to administer a crushing blow upon the shrinking boy's defenseless head, when there came a whizz and a crash and the would-be castigator fell to the floor as if the chimney had toppled over on him.

"Can you tell me," quietly asked the newcomer of the obsequious barkeeper, who stood nervously wiping a tumbler on his dirty apron.

"Can you tell me where I can find a man known as 'Way-up Bill?"

"Thar he is at yer feet, sir," smilingly returned the dispenser of liquid fire, lost in admiration of the new-comer's magnificent physique, "an' it war about him that Snipsey, thar got inter trouble with Barker."

And turning and looking down at his feet where 'Way-up Bill lay snoring without paying any attention to his late adversary, who sat in the corner, groaning, he muttered sorrowfully:

"And it is thus we meet, Frank?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE COUSINS.

THE last words had barely died from the speaker's lips when there was a clatter of hoofs outside, a sudden cessation of the noise, as if the horse had been reined in with a jerk, and in a moment a second stranger entered the saloon.

The last arrival was our friend Oll, who had just reached 'Way-up, having pushed on since receiving Powell's note, sparing no time and galloping night and day, with but short intervals of rest, until he had reached his destination.

Surveying the inmates of the bar-room for a moment in silence, Oll said:

"You kin give me a stiff drink o' yer best whisk. I'm near dead an' plum tired out, an' stranger"—speaking to the other new-comer—"Ye kin j'ine me."

"You are courteous, sir, and I will not refuse. You may give me some of the same liquor that this gentleman is going to drink, barkeeper."

"Yes, an' while we air a-waitin' fur ye ter wait on us, Mister Barkeep', ye kin answer a questing fer me."

"Cert'ly, gentlemen, ennything ter please yer."

"I be a-huntin' fur a feller by the name o' Frank Carter—do ye know him?"

"'Carter,'" repeated the barkeeper, as he set bottle and glasses on the bar, "'Carter,' seems ez if I'd heerd thet name, but I'll be derved ef—"

"Who wants Frank Carter," asked a high-pitched voice, as "Snipsey" came forward to where the two men were standing, glasses in hand.

"Yes," added the stranger who had preceded Oll into the room, "who wants Frank Carter?"

"W'y," continued "Oll, seein' ez how ye air both so much interested, I'll tell ye both. I want Frank Carter."

"Well, that's me!" said Snipsey, looking at Oll as much as to say—"and what are you going to do about it?"

"You?" broke in the stranger, "you Frank Carter? Why that's my name. Where do you hail from?"

"From St. Louis? And you?"

"From Kentucky. You have a sister?"

"Ivy, yes."

"Then shake hands, Cousin Frank, for cousins we are through my father and yours, who are first cousins."

"But where is your sister?"

"Somewhere on the plains, coming from St. Louis to live out here."

"On the plains—but—"

"Yes, on ther plain," interrupted Oll, who was much interested in, as well as being much mystified by this conversation between the two cousins.

"On ther plains, a pris'n'r in ther Mormon train, bein' carried to Utah, whar she'll be 'sealed' ter sum high ol' Mormon who'll break her heart an' sperit."

"A prisoner among the Mormons! My sister!" cried Snipsey, doubly surprised at this new turn of affairs, when two strangers should know of his sister—one of them of her whereabouts.

"Yes," continued Oll, motioning for the other to wait a moment before speaking, "and I come from her ter you to beg yer ter git ready ter rescue her."

"Git ready, an' w'en the Mormons air in the Breakneck Pass, a man in the camp'll send us word w'en an' bow ter purreed."

"Yer mus' mek no 'tempt ter help her sooner'n he sen's ye word, fer ther Mormons 'ud massacre the girl ef they thought ez she was a-tryin' ter 'scape."

"But who is this that is aiding her?" cried Frank Carter—Ivy's cousin.

"Frank Powell, ther whitest man on y'arth, an' him as sez no, lies!" and the giant brought down his single hand on the bar with a crash that caused every glass and bottle in the shanty to dance a jig.

"But," said the Kentucky Carter, or Frank, senior, as he may be called, "what does this mean? I was told by a resident in Denver that

you, Frank, had become known as 'Way-up Bill, and that your sister was with you. There is some mystery about the matter, and I am going to fathom it before many days.

"When do you expect that the Mormon train will reach the pass?" he added, turning to Oll.

"Not fur a long time. We kin git ready an' then we mus' wait fur ther doctor's word, an' he'll send it, don't you worry 'bout thet."

"Well, suppose you come to my shanty, Frank," said Carter junior, "and you come too—you two can find room there and it is a better place to talk over matters than in here."

The other two agreed readily to this proposition, and the trio left the bar-room.

Black Ben was standing at the rack in front of the saloon, looking somewhat thin but still able to run for a man's life, the other horse—obtained from Claren—having succumbed to the wild ride and heavy weight of his rider.

Leading the horse, which was much admired by the two Carters, Oll followed them down the single street of 'Way-up and soon came to a miner's shanty which Carter junior announced as his own, and here they stopped, a shed near by which had a padlocked door to it, being given up to Ben, who was soon munching his corn and looking with evident satisfaction at a rack full of hay overhead.

Going into the house, young Carter immediately proceeded to light a fire and to prepare some food, for both his guests expressed themselves as being perfectly ravenous.

While they were waiting, "Snipsey," or Carter, junior, asked his cousin how he happened to be in that part of the country and what his plans were.

"My plans are all subordinate to Ivy's rescue, now," replied his cousin. "As to how I happen to be here, that can wait. The most important thing just at this moment is that this gentleman should put us in complete possession of all the facts he has regarding her."

This being acquiesced in by "Snipsey," Oll proceeded to acquaint them with everything that he knew regarding Powell and Ivy, omitting—not from any guilty feeling, however—from his narrative the fact that he was the hero of the hanging episode.

"By Jovel!" cried Carter, when Oll had finished; "that Powell must be a trump, and I'll be mighty glad to know him when the time comes."

"And you—your name?"

"Oliver Hunt air my full name, but folks—leastwise them thet knows me purty well—calls me 'Oll.'"

"Well, Oll, you're a brick, and there's my hand on it, for myself and for Miss Carter."

"Say, Frank," cried Snipsey. "Do you know Ivy?"

"Know her? I might as well tell you now as not—we are engaged to be married next winter."

"Engaged? And I never knew it! But I ain't had but one letter from Ivy for I don't know how long, and in that she told me she was going to start for this place very soon."

"Only one letter? Why, she told me that she wrote you at least once a month, and that she heard from you about as often."

"Look here, Frank, you've been dreaming. I haven't written to Ivy in half a dozen years except once, and that was to tell her, about a year ago, that I had left Denver and come to 'Way-up."

"Then there has been some crooked work going on here. I suspected something wrong in the first place, and when you said your name was Frank Carter I was convinced of it."

"While we are eating I will tell you what I know, and we can lay our plans accordingly."

"Then let us sit down," and Snipsey's invitation was accepted.

CHAPTER XXII.

'WAY-UP BILL IDENTIFIED.

"I FIRST met Ivy about two years ago," said Frank Carter, the elder, when the meal was well under way, "in St. Louis, and, being her second cousin, soon became very good friends with her. The gentleman with whom she was living—her uncle, and yours, Frank—rather opposing my visits, it seemed to me, but not showing any open hostility."

"As I say, our acquaintances soon ripened into friendship, and I can add that our friendship soon ripened into love, and it was not very long before we were engaged, but in secret."

"I had sounded your uncle regarding the matter, and found him so averse to any thought of Ivy's marrying, that I dropped the subject

then and there, and never broached it to him again.

"But Ivy and I became engaged, nevertheless—this being nearly a year ago—she promising to marry me when a year should have elapsed.

"She showed me your letters, and spoke very fondly of you, often saying that one of her most ardent hopes and desires was that you two might be reunited, being orphans and the only children.

"Your letters spoke of your success in mining, of your removal to 'Way-up, where you stated that you had large interests, employed large numbers of men, who, I remember you said, would fight to the death for you.

"I was called away from St. Louis to Kentucky by the death of my father, some two months ago, and left Ivy well and happy, but was compelled to forego writing to her or receiving her letters, as your uncle's opposition to our intimacy had grown stronger and stronger during the past few weeks.

"The settlement of the estate that had been left to me occupied some days, but that having been arranged, I hastened back to St. Louis only to find that Ivy had gone and, according to your uncle's statement, was then well on her way to this place.

"She had not left me a word of explanation, and for a time I was nearly crazed with doubt and fear until, as I was leaving the house, an old servant, to whom I had shown some kindnesses, appeared and slyly handed me a note from your sister, which I opened as soon as I was out of sight of the house and found to be a few words of attempted explanation.

"She had learned that her uncle was false to her and opposed our marriage on account of some property he had of hers that he would have to render an account of, and that there had been an explosion and many threats.

"Fearing for her life, and not knowing when I would return, she had converted some valuables into money and had left St. Louis, intending to join the first wagon train bound West, she could find, and seek her brother, and begging me to follow.

"Having nothing to detain me I immediately set out to hunt up some trace of Ivy, but without success, and came to the conclusion that she had joined the train in some disguise, and that any further inquiry would be useless, so I purchased an outfit and fortunately finding a band of men who were about to start across the plains, I cast my lot with them and we started.

"All of us being mounted on horseback, we traveled much faster than any wagon-train, but taking the southerly trail, found no trace of the missing train, and after a tedious trip of some weeks, that passed without any particular incident, we arrived in Denver, where, from worry, exhaustion and over-exercise, I proceeded to fall sick and lay on my back for a long time, unable to move hand or foot.

"In the apology for a hotel where I stopped, the barkeeper was a former resident of this place, and told me all about Frank Carter, saying that he had become known as 'Way-up Bill' and was one of the most enterprising of the miners in this section.

"Now you have my story, Frank, what do you think of it and how do you account for it?"

"I don't know what to think and I can't account for it," replied Snipsey, his eyes showing his amazement.

"I haven't done badly up here, but I haven't got anybody working for me, and as for being known as 'Way-up Bill, and as for writing letters so regularly to Ivy, I confess I am stumped."

"Well, is there any such man as 'Way-up Bill in the place?" queried Frank musingly.

"Oh, yes; he was lying on the floor of the 'Pick and Shovel,' paralyzed drunk, when you came in and hit Barker that smash in the jaw, for which I am much obliged, by the way, Frank," replied Snipsey.

"Oh, that's all right," said Frank, waving the matter aside as of no particular importance.

"But tell me, who is this 'Way-up Bill?"

"He's a gambler—although he don't gamble much, yet always has plenty of money. His name, I believe, is Bill Brenton, at least that's what he has tattooed on his right arm. I saw it accidentally one day, and right vexed he was about it, too."

"Bill Brenton did yer say, young feller?" asked Oll, for the first time joining in the conversation.

"Yes."

"Then I know him," said Oll, with a peculiar smile, "an' ef thar's bin enny crooked work a-doin', an' his name air mixed up with it, yer kin bet thet he air consarned in it."

"Eggscuse me, ef I leaves yer fur a few minits, gents; I'll soon be back an', ef I'm not purty far gone in my reckonin', Mister Brenton'll come back with me, an' tell ye all he knows 'bout this yar matter."

And with no further words the giant rose and left the room, closing the door after him, and leaving the two cousins wondering what would turn up next.

They were not left long in suspense, for soon footsteps were heard outside, somebody kicked lightly on the door with the toe of his boot and, Snipsey having opened it in response to the summons, Oll walked in, carrying the limp body of 'Way-up Bill on his shoulder as easily as if his burden had been a child, and proceeding to a bunk in the corner, dumped his load as unceremoniously as if it had been a sack of meal.

'Way-up was decidedly under the influence of liquor and snored away in complete unconsciousness of where he was, or what was going on, while the two cousins, seating themselves, waited for Oll's explanation of his acquaintance with the gambler, seeing which, the giant drew up a stool and, lighting a pipe that he found in his pocket, began:

"It air some time sence I lost thet arm," indicating the empty sleeve that hung loosely at his side by a nod of the head, "an' w'en ther axydent happen'd thet tuk it off ther' waan't but two pussons present, me an' thet feller thar," and he spat contemptuously in the direction of the sleeping man, who grunted unconsciously.

"He hed been a-playin' keerds with a pard o' mine, and I cotched him a-cheatin', so, w'en ther game war over, endin' on account o' my pard bein' bu'sted, an' every one hed lef' ther room but us two, I tol' him thet he war nothin' but a thief an' thet I wanted him ter give up ther stuff he hed won from Ike.

"An' w'ot does the varmint do but hand out the dust 'thout a word, an' then, ez I war a-walkin' off with it, plump me through ther arm, a-breakin' it, an' then knock' me col' with his gun, arter w'ich he robbed me an' disappeared.

"I hain't seen him sence till ter-day, but, gentlemen, w'en he bez slep' off his licker, I'll show yer some fun, an' I'll promise ter fin' out w'ot ye wants ter know."

CHAPTER XXIII.

'WAY-UP BILL'S CONFESSION.

THE day passed quietly enough, the three inmates of the cabin—Oll and the two cousins—realizing that there was nothing to do but to wait, while 'Way-up Bill snored on until late in the afternoon, and the shades of evening were crawling up the mountain-sides when he awakened.

He sat up, bewildered, rubbed his eyes, looked at the three figures sitting silently by the fire and finally, throwing one leg out of the bunk on to the floor, sat up.

"Look here, Snipsey," he cried, as he recognized the younger Carter, "what does this mean? Did I get overloaded and fall into your ranch, without being invited?"

"Well, you always were a good boy and I'll not forget your taking care of me," he added, apparently having lost all recollection of his trouble at the Pick and Shovel.

"Introduce your friends and we'll all go to the saloon and have a drink at my expense, for I'm as dry as a covered bridge and as nervous as a kitten."

"One of us don't need no interdoocin'," answered Oll, "an' thet's me, Mister Bill Brenton, ez ye user be called back in ther States, an' ez I call yer now."

"Who are you?" cried 'Way-up,' springing out into the room, and feeling in vain for his weapons, for he had been disarmed. "Don't sit there skulking in the dark, but show your face like an honest man!"

"W'ot do you know 'bout 'hones' men," Bill Brenton?" growled Oll, rising and removing his seat so that he was placed between 'Way-up and the door. "Ef you ever knowed ennythin' 'bout honesty, ye forgot it long ago."

"But I hain't no objecshun ter a light, an' ef Mister Carter'll light up ye'll find out who it is thet air a-talkin' to yer," in response to which Snipsey immediately struck a match and lighted the candle that stood on the table, and then sat down again, a silent and interested listener with his cousin to the conversation between the others.

And as the dim light flared up, 'Way-up Bill leaned forward, shading his eyes with his hand,

and peered eagerly through the obscurity at Oll, but, apparently, without recognizing him.

"Hyar's su'thin' thet'll help yer mem'ry," said Oll, after a moment's silence, as he lifted his empty sleeve, held it up for a moment, and then let it drop.

"What!" cried Brenton, fairly shrieking out the words, and shrinking back against the wall of the room, "Oll Hunt come back to life?"

"Not percisely, seein' ez how he waan't never dead."

"But I killed—" and Brenton stopped, realizing that he had said too much.

"Ye tho't ye killed him, ye mis'able skunk, but ye didn't, an' now he's a-goin' ter kill you!" and Oll fairly hissed the last words out.

"No, no!" cried 'Way-up, cringing in terror. "Snipsey, stranger, you won't sit there and let him murder me!" and he crawled to where the two cousins were sitting, and crouched on the floor behind them.

But they sat unmoved and apparently determined not to interfere.

"I am a-goin' ter kill you, hyar, after I've cut off yer right arm, or yer left arm—I'll gi'n yer ther cb'ice—close up ter yer shoulder," and Oll drew out a formidable-looking knife with blood-thirsty coolness.

"Torture and then kill me! No; you shall die first!" hurled Brenton, throwing himself upon Oll, with the fury of a madman, and, for an instant, staggering him with the violence of the shock.

But Oll quickly recovered himself, and grasping 'Way-up in his powerful clutch, threw him to the ground and held him there, the knife falling to the floor.

"Now," said Oll, as he towered above his shrinking adversary, "ye don't deserre it, but I'll gi'n ye a chance ter save yer mis'able life."

"Oh, anything; I'll do anything if you'll only spare me," cried Brenton.

"Wal, then tell us w'ot ye knows 'bout yer bein' called Frank Carter, an' w'ot ye knows consarnin' Miss Ivy an' her uncle."

"I don't know what you mean; I don't know what you are talking about," cried Brenton. "I swear—"

"Ugh!" snarled Oll, resting his knee on the other's chest and holding him as in a vise, "so you will have it, will you?"

And he reached over and picked up his knife that lay near by, and leaned down as if to begin operations on Brenton's shoulder, when the latter cried:

"Stop! Mercy! I will tell you all I know about what you ask."

"Then git up an' begin," and Oll allowed Brenton to rise, which he did, and seated himself on the edge of the bunk, first taking two or three long breaths and feeling his chest as if to satisfy himself that Oll's tremendous weight had not crushed it in or cracked any of the bones.

And then he began his story, the trio listening to him attentively, but none interrupted him, save by a deep-drawn breath from time to time.

"It is now some years sence I lived in St. Louis, where I became acquainted with a Doctor Aukeny, who was a physician of high education, but little practice, owing to his declining to attend calls, preferring, as he said, to devote his time to chemical experiments, and to studying abstruse subjects.

"This was the motive he gave to the world, and passers-by, seeing a light burning in his study until far into the morning hours, would say: 'Doctor Aukeny will make some wonderful discovery some day, and deservedly so, for no one in the city works as he does.'

"But, had they known the truth, they would have seen that the study had no occupant during those hours, but that during all those hours the light burned in a deserted room, behind a locked door, while the doctor was absent elsewhere.

"And I was the only man in St. Louis who knew where he was, for he led a dual existence, being to the world Doctor Rotius Aukeny; to me Dirk Deering, my partner in the finest gambling-house in the entire States.

"And it was in the latter place that he made the money that enabled him to keep up his fine establishment and to appear among the richest men of the city, and it was there that he did me a favor that bound me to him in a certain way, and that influenced me when he requested aid from me in a certain project he had on hand.

"Something—no matter what—happened about that time, and I left St. Louis for other lands, finally drifting out here, and here began the impersonation of Frank Carter for the doctor's benefit, receiving all of Snipsey's letters, and answering them as coming from him, they being inclosed by the doctor to me, I always reading and destroying them.

"Another friend of mine was in the plot, but he is in Denver now, and sent me word of any one inquiring for Frank Carter.

"The doctor was trying, in some way, to get rid of his ward, Ivy Carter, that he might obtain possession of her property, and he kept me well supplied with funds in payment for my work.

"The scheme was that she should come out here and join me, and then we were to see what could be done, I going to Denver to meet her.

"The doctor would have no killing and I wouldn't touch—to harm—a hair of her head, so we would probably have taken her away to Mexico and married her off to some one.

"But things turned out all right. Ivy left her uncle's house, determined to join me, he only opposing her enough to make her firm in her determination to come and cause her to leave the house in secret.

"And our work is ended, for Doctor Aukeny has since learned, as he wrote me, that she had been entrapped into joining a Mormon train, and once in the clutches of those men she's safe to reach Utah and be sealed to some one.

"And that's everything I know, and I'll swear to it."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ZEKE ARRIVES.

WHEN Brenton had finished, Oll turned to the two cousins and exultantly cried:

"Tbar, gentlemen, do ye see thet it's ez I said, an' this yar pizen skunk air mixed up in ther hull bizness. An' now, w'ot'll we do 'ith ther cuss?"

"That," said Snipsey to his cousin, "is a matter concerning you as much as it does me, and I think we had better postpone the matter until to-morrow."

"Precisely my idea, Frank," replied his cousin, "but I think we can make better use of the man than killing him, although he deserves the punishment, I am sure."

"Dead, though, he would be of no further use to us, but alive you can perhaps, through him, bring Doctor Aukeny up to toe the mark and make him settle up with you, for I suppose that you are equally interested with your sister in any property he may be the trustee of."

"Very likely," said Snipsey. "I have often wondered what became of my father's large fortune, and have no doubt that my uncle knows more about it than he would care to tell; but using Brenton, here, as a witness, we can force him to restore any property he may have diverted to his own use."

"But now we'll have supper and then, as I suppose you two are tired, we will turn in—we will not leave the cabin until we have word from Doctor Powell."

"And as for you, Bill, don't you try to ride rusty, for, witness or no witness, if you try to cut up any capers, we will perform a surgical operation on your arm that will leave you in the same condition with Oll, there, and then let him do as he pleases with you."

"You hear me?"

"S'elp me Bob, Snipsey, I won't stir, but I'll stay right here until you give me leave to go, only promise me that you'll not harm me."

"How could I play cards with only one hand?"

"Well, if you'll go East and give your testimony regarding your conspiracy with the doctor, we'll be easy with you, if Oll consents."

"Oh, ef it's ennythin' ter help ther gal w'ot Doctor Powell air a-helpin', I'll do jes' w'ot yer say." And Oll extended his hand to Snipsey, who grasped it warmly, when all turned in and got supper, Bill lending a helping hand and being treated as one of them, but being fastened to Oll when they retired and forced to occupy the inside of the same bunk with the giant.

Nothing disturbed their slumbers and nothing of importance transpired during the day, none of them, however, going far from the cabin, not knowing at what hour Powell's summons would come and they would be called upon to "up and be doing."

And so the days rolled by, each one growing more and more unbearable, until the two cousins grew nearly wild, unable to control themselves and imagining all sorts of painful things about Ivy.

And finally it was agreed that in case nothing was heard by the next evening, they would start out, despite the entreaties of Oll, who begged them to remember Powell's request and wait until they had heard from him—anything, they said, was better than this unbearable suspense.

And as the sun began to sink low in the west, they commenced their preparations, Oll refus-

ing to accompany them, saying that he had promised to await the doctor's messenger, and wait he would. He did not believe that anything had happened to delay him and had too much confidence in Powell to doubt for a moment that everything would turn out all right.

Yet the cousins persisted, and, mounting their horses, turned for a moment to speak a parting word to Oll, who stood in the doorway, when there came a sudden clatter of iron-shod hoofs up the road and sweeping round the bend came a horse and rider, enveloped in a cloud of dust, from the midst of which came a chuckle, a yell and a howl, all mingled together, followed by a voice that cried:

"Hi, da, Massa Oll, how is you?"

"Ef it ain't thet nigger Zeke I'm durned," said Oll, sententiously.

"What," cried Carter the elder, "Powell's messenger?"

"Yes, Powell's nigger."

"And just in time," added Snipsey, as the two dismounted and awaited the coming of Zeke, who rapidly drew near, stopped in front of the cabin, dismounted and immediately threw at least a dozen cart-wheels, spinning around like the spokes in a sulky drawn by a trotter at full speed.

His exuberance being finally quieted, the boy came up to Oll, grinning from ear to ear and crying:

"Golly, Massa Oll, but I'se glad ter see you—t'ought I'd neber git yar."

"You come from Doctor Powell?" asked Frank, senior, trembling with anxiety.

"Right straight, sah," replied Zeke, pulling off his cap and bowing his woolly head.

"And what is your message?"

"Hit's fur Mass Oll, sah, an' twell he gi'ns me permission ter inderkate ter you w'ot I iz de b'arer ob, dis chile must decline ter eloocidate any infurmation."

"All right, Zeke, these gentlemen air fr'ens o' mine, an' one o' 'em is Miss Ivy's brother an' t'other's her cousin."

"Shol now, ef dat's so, bosses, ye kin know de hull o' w'ot I'se got ter say. But who am deoder gent?" regarding Brenton with distrust and suspicion.

"Ye'r right, lad," said Oll. "He hain't no bizness ter hear w'ot yer's got ter say, so git inter ther shanty, Bill Brenton, an' stay thar till yer' wanted."

"Shut ther door arter ye, too, an' don't listen or—"

And the giant pointed significantly to his empty sleeve and then at 'Way-up Bill's right arm, which significant gesture was sufficient, and the ex-gambler disappeared inside the cabin, closing the door behind him.

"Now, boy, hurry and tell us what word you bring from Doctor Powell. But tell us first: Is Miss Ivy well?"

"Puffeckly, sah, puffeckly, an' sen's heaps o' lub to her brudder an' to her cousin, an' 'pears ter me dat dar's a heap mo' fo' her cousin dan fur her brudder. Yab! yab!" and the young implaughed uproariously.

"All right, Zeke," said Frank, senior. "I've got a good many dollars stowed away for yer, and when we are all back in the States you'll be the boss on my Kentucky farm and shall manage the stables, but tell us now, and as quickly as you can, what Doctor Powell wants us to do."

Stripped of all the additions with which Zeke adorned his narrative, Powell's message took shape in this manner:

That on the 14th of the month—two days later—the Mormons would enter the pass and would probably camp for dinner at Hidden Pool, below Hanging Rock—with which places Snipsey was familiar.

As soon as the Mormons were busy with their mid-day meal, Powell and Ivy would walk up to the bend in the pass, where Frank Carter was to be with all the men he could muster, and where it would be an easy matter to hold the Mormons at bay, owing to the bend in the road and the narrowness of the path, in case they were pursued, until night came, when they could escape into the mountains and seek the shelter of 'Way-up.

This plan seemed feasible enough and it was agreed that they should wait until the day named, in the mean time collecting what force they could, and make the attack as suggested, Zeke, telling them that Powell and Ivy were granted a certain amount of liberty, although more than one pair of eyes was always on them.

And Zeke having asked for some food, they opened the door and Oll entered first, looking about for Brenton, but in vain.

He had removed a plank from the back of the building and escaped!

CHAPTER XXV.

OLL TO THE RESCUE.

SEEK as they would they could find no trace of Brenton, and they were compelled to abandon the chase and return, unsuccessful to the cabin, when Snipsey proposed that he should go into 'Way-up—for his house was about half-a-mile away from the mining-camp—and obtain volunteers for the coming attack on the Mormons.

"And maybe," he added, "I will come across 'Way-up Bill, and if I do I'll fetch him back, you may depend on it."

This was acquiesced in, and young Carter disappeared in the direction of the camp, or town as it may be called, while Oll and the elder Carter withdrew into the cabin to await his return.

"Bad job thet, a-lettin' Brenton git away," said Oll, shaking his head.

"Well, I guess we can make Doctor Aukeny give up without his assistance, by threatening him with the law."

"Thet hain't ther trubble; s'posin' Brenton goes ter ther Mormon camp an' gives ther snap away, so that they can't escape, w'ot air ther doctor an' ther gal a-goin' ter do 'bout it?"

"True. Then we had better send Zeke back to the camp with a message to the doctor, advising him of the situation and counseling him to get rid of Brenton in some manner, before he has a chance to betray our plan to the Mormons, for there is but little doubt that he overheard us."

"So call Zeke, and let us see what he has to say about it."

But Zeke, on being told of the proposition, objected most decidedly.

"Ef I goes back 'mong dem Mormons," he said, his eyes popping out of his head until it seemed as if they must inevitably drop from their sockets, "dat man Welker'll kill me sho'!"

"What has he got against you?" asked Frank Carter, amused at the boy's earnestness.

"He am mad 'kase I done whop his boy, licked de stuffin' outen him, 'kase why Massa Powell, wen he done tole me dat I mus' tak' de word ter you-all's bout comin' ter help him, he sed ez how I mus' hab a good 'scuse fur leabin' de camp, so't de Mormons 'u'dn't 'spect nuthin'."

"So I jess turn in an' I whop dat Welker boy ser'ous. Who-e! I jes' gi'n him de wu'ss t'rash-in' he eber got an' den I jes' skun out, liken I was 'feard ob de kyars."

"No, sireel I dassen't go back, an' ef I did, dey'd 'spect su'thin', an' I c'u'dden't git ter speak ter Massa Powell nor to Missy Ivy no way."

"So that plan is knocked in the head," said Carter, seeing that they could, under the circumstances, make no use of Zeke.

"Well, we will have to trust to luck and hope that Brenton did not hear what we said and that he will keep away from the Mormons."

In a few moments Snipsey returned, and he looked so despondent, so down-hearted, that both his cousin and Oll started up, wondering what new calamity had befallen them.

"What do you think?" he cried, as he entered the cabin and sunk down on a stool near by.

"The camp is deserted—there's not a scul there but the barkeeper, and he's going to pull out as soon as he can get his things ready."

"What do you mean? How did it happen?" asked his cousin utterly bewildered.

"Oh, a day or two ago some one brought news of a tremendous strike of rich ore over on the other side of the range, and that was enough—the whole camp moved and is now forty miles away, and as none of us has been into the town for several days, we, naturally, know nothing of it at all."

"But my sister—what are we going to do about her?" and the boy—for he was such in years—placed his head in his hands and sobbed as though his heart would break, his tears, springing from such a source, doing him infinite honor.

"W'ot 'll we do?" roared the giant. "W'ot 'll we do! W'y us three 'll go an' save yer sister, us three will, thet's w'ot we 'll do."

"An' Frank Powell 'll help us; so stop yer whimperin' an' brace up. D'ye think we air a-goin' ter weaken? Nary weak!"

His words infused some of his own spirit into the other two, and springing up they grasped his hand and felt more confidence from that moment.

The Mormons had arrived at the camping-ground mentioned by Powell in his message to Frank Carter, and all were busy preparing the noon meal, except the Magic Doctor and Ivy, who strolled about, apparently aimlessly, she

admiring the different views that he pointed out, but all the time gradually approaching the upper end of the camp and going further up the pass.

At a moment when, for an instant, they were out of ear-shot of any of the numerous groups that gathered about the different fires, Ivy took advantage of their position to say to Powell, hurriedly:

"Oh, doctor, if they should fail us!"

"Do not fear," he replied, confidently, "they will not fail us."

"Glance up at the Hanging Rock," and he pointed a little distance up the pass where the road ran around under a sheer precipice that sprang straight up, and on the topmost edge of which was balanced a huge boulder, many tons in weight, that seemed as if the slightest breath would topple it over.

"School yourself now!" and raising his hand he touched his hat, when, in answer, a tiny bit of cloth appeared for an instant along side the Hanging Rock.

"I noticed that some time ago," said the doctor, "and only awaited a favorable opportunity to tell you of it."

"Your friends are doubtless waiting for us just around the point of the road, and in a very few moments you will doubtless be free, and—"

He stopped abruptly, for at that moment a man appeared walking quickly, whose face was unknown to him, and who, as he passed the doctor and Ivy, took off his hat with an exaggerated bow and said, sneeringly:

"Good-morning, Doctor Frank Powell; good-morning, Miss Ivy Carter; you are out for a walk, I see!"

And he passed on as quickly as he had come, stopping to ask a question of the first group he approached, and then hurrying in the direction of the place where Welker stood.

"Who was that, doctor?" asked Ivy, frightened by the man's manner.

"I do not know; probably some one of the Mormons whose appearance is not familiar to me."

"But come, we can walk a little faster, and now comes the critical moment!"

And they hurried on toward the bend in the road, where it turned suddenly to the right, it being hidden by the bold corner of the rock that here jutted out frowningly and rose so steep, while far below brawled the brook whose course the mountain-pass followed.

But as they hastened on, they heard a shout behind them, and looking over his shoulder, Powell saw, a quarter of a mile behind, the stranger who had spoken to him, pointing in his direction, while every man in the camp was hurrying to Welker, who was calling them to assemble.

And catching Ivy about the waist, Powell broke into a run, while the band of Mormons started in pursuit with a hoarse yell, the stranger in the lead.

Nearer and nearer they drew, when, high up overhead, a rifle cracked, and the new-comer pitched headlong in his tracks, shot to death by Oil, who had recognized Brenton.

But this only gave brief respite to the fugitives, yet they managed to reach the bend and sprang 'round it, expecting to find themselves in the midst of a band of rescuers, but found themselves confronted only by the two Carters and Zeke.

And as they rushed around the bend, the two cousins stepped forward and emptied their rifles into the rapidly advancing crowd, while a shot from Oil kept them company; but the effect was barely noticeable, and still the body of men swept on—what could three men avail against a hundred?

It seemed as if the girl must inevitably be captured and her companions suffer some frightful death, for they could load and fire but once more, and then?—Powell shuddered to think of it.

But just as the leaders of the Mormons arrived within a few yards of the bend—Welker among the number—there came from overhead a mighty rush and roar as if the whole mountain were caving in upon them, and as they stood a moment paralyzed with fear and then turned to flee, the Hanging Rock, loosened from its bed and bringing with it tons upon tons of earth and stones, crashed down upon them, burying them deep under its mass and crushing them out of all semblance of humanity, while a few feet away the others stood safe.

Oil had, by a mighty exertion of his enormous strength, loosened the rock from its foundation and hurled it down on the Mormons just in time to save the girl and her friends.

CHAPTER XXVI.

AND LAST.

BUT a few words more.

Powell accompanied the fair girl, whom he had so carefully and nobly cared for, back to St. Louis, the two cousins, One-Armed Oil, Zeke and Old Eph (who had remained in the camp and was unhurt) being also of the party, and it was mainly through his efforts that Doctor Aukeny was induced to restore to Frank and Ivy the large fortune left to them by their father and which he had obtained possession of.

Frank also assisted at the wedding, a short time after, accompanying the happy pair to their Kentucky home, where Zeke was installed as head man of the stables, and Old Eph given a soft and lazy berth, while Oil was made general overseer and manager.

Snipsey—or Frank Carter, junior, returned to Colorado after some little time and there by judicious investments more than quadrupled his fortune and is now one of the most influential men in the State, being seriously talked of for U. S. Senator.

And Frank Powell? Happy in the consciousness of having performed a good action and righted a wrong, he stayed for a time to witness the happiness that resulted from his actions, and then, bidding all an affectionate good-by, left them and again started West, leaving young Zeke blubbering like a broken-hearted child.

And the warmest wishes of loving hearts followed him, night and day.

THE END.

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